

A Step-By-Step Guide For Rebuilding a Country

What You Can Do When the “Wow” Wears Off

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Welcome to our new digs and Happy New Year, as well. It's interesting, when I was a young man - a few weeks ago - I remember how idealistic I was. I remember how frustrated I was with older men because I knew that we could change the world, but it seems like a lot of the older guys had given up on that idea. Now, last week I was listening to NPR and I was listening to me back then, somebody on the radio talking about their idealism and how they were going to change the world and I remember last week, just this bit of cynicism towards that person speaking. I was thinking, "You really don't know. You really don't understand. You don't get it. You haven't been there. You don't know how hard it is." I got to thinking about it later and I said, "I don't like that Pat Morley. I don't want to be that Pat Morley. I don't really want to be that wild idealist either. I would like to have some realism in the work that I do, but I don't want to be that person." You know? I don't think any of us want to be overly idealistic and have rose colored glasses on, but I don't think any of us really want to be mired down by the cynicism that can overtake us.

We're doing a series called A Step by Step Guide for Rebuilding a Country. It's a study in the Book of Nehemiah. It's a book that can help us actually get things done without being too idealistic, but also without not doing things that can be done because we become cynical. First, let's do a shout out today. Today's shout out goes to the Mighty Men of God. Ten guys, they're meeting weekly at the church on Saturdays using the video bible study. I don't know which camera to look at so back here I want to welcome you guys. New location, that's why. The Mighty Men of God, Woodland United Fellowship in Woodland California. Their leader is Everett Doody and I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm and arousing Men in the Mirror welcome to the Mighty Men of God. One, two, three, hoo-rah. Welcome, guys. We are so glad to have you with us.

Just by way of review, and I've been reviewing with you each week because it is cumulative and hey, I can barely remember what I did yesterday and so it's just a good idea to do that. The first thing we talked about is the first step on rebuilding a country, or a community, or a business, or a marriage, or even our own lives. This is a process that can apply across the board to lots of different things. The first step is just figuring out what God wants you to do. We talked about starting with the thing that burdens you. The thing that makes you ache. The thing that makes you groan and then letting God give you a vision through prayer and then just being determined to act even when you do feel sadness and fear because that's what Nehemiah did. The big idea was the first step to every great outcome is to imagine it's possibility. Then, we talked about the three things that you're going to need to get started. You're going to have to have the right resources, the right plan, and the right team. The big idea was preparation without prayer is presumption, that's why pray for the vision. Then, likewise, prayer without preparation is presumption. That's why getting the right plan, resources, and team together is so important.

Then we talked about creating early momentum for this thing that you have the vision to change or to rebuild. Inspire by dreaming big, but mobilize by starting small and then every contribution is important no matter how small, or big, or large. Always make the next step believably small. The big idea? Dream unbelievably big but start believably small. Last time we were together we looked at the three keys to overcoming opposition because as soon as you get into the deal, tried to rebuild something, the opposition starts. We talked about expecting opposition but trusting God and then taking responsibility, and that was the big idea. Expect opposition. Trust God. Take responsibility.

You have this incredible vision. It's either your vision and others have bought into your vision, or it's someone else's vision and you bought in to it. There's been a lot of excitement. This vision that seems to solve the thing that just makes your heart ache. It's your burden. It's the thing that's so troubling to you and so I'm looking around the room and I'm just thinking of all the different kinds of ministries and all the different countries that have been rebuilt here. All the different broken down walls that men in this room are going after. Addictions, marriages, families, communities. You have a group of people, they share this burden and you get started and you saw some incredible early wins and it was exciting. It was intoxicating. Then reality set in. Turns out to be a lot harder than you thought it was going to be. It looks like it's going to be a lot more work than you thought it was going to be. Because of that, because of the disappointment, because of the frustration a lot of people that were with you have bailed. Then a lot of other people that are still with you, you realize that they are there for the wrong reasons.

Now, the issue becomes what do you do when the wow wears off? That's the title for today. What Can You Do When the Wow Wears Off? "Wow! What a great vision. Wow! What an exciting enterprise. Wow! What a movement. I can't wait to be part of that." Then reality sets in because it's just so much harder than we all thought it was going to be.

Turn to Nehemiah chapter five in your bibles. Nehemiah chapter five. Let's take a look at what Nehemiah was facing. This is a bit of a review. We know that number one, he was brought back or set back to rebuild his country. That's why we're calling this A Step by Step Guide for Rebuilding a Country. He was set back to rebuild his country by the king and given the resources to do it. It was his vision and he looked around, he saw that the biggest problem that they had in the community, the problem he deemed to be the biggest problem, you may have gone there and come up with a different conclusion, but the security of the city. He decided to rebuild the wall around the city. He shared his vision, people caught the vision and then they got very involved.

Then, as they got involved, all of these other problems began to show up as well. There was opposition by enemies, Sanballat and Tobiah and all the people that they were able to muster. Chapter four verse ten talks about the strength of the laborers was giving out because there was so much rubble. You had the debris problem, just the practical problem of the debris. Then, in chapter five, now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against the Jewish brothers. Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous in order for us to eat and stay alive. We have to get some food." Others are saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our homes to get grain during the famine." There was a famine. I don't know if I've ever heard anybody actually talk about this, but not only were they trying to rebuild their country, they were doing it when they were in a famine. In other words, there was a huge great recession going on. They were in a famine.

Not only that, they were mortgaging their fields. Everybody was going into debt just to survive. They had massive debt, they were in a great recession. Verse four, still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. There were, in addition to being in a

recession and to having high debts, there was a suffocating tax burden. The tax rates were exorbitant. We'll learn more about that later in the lesson.

Verse five. "Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen as though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless because our fields and our vineyards belong to others." There were foreclosures going on. The way they handled debt back then was very different, but anyway, there was exorbitant interest being charged. Some of the people got involved in the movement, but they got involved for the wrong reasons. They saw an opportunity for personal financial gain and they were charging each other exorbitant interest rates. And you're Nehemiah and you have to lead this sorry thing to rebuild this country, you see.

That's what he was facing. Let me just ask you as we get going here. You had this vision, this ache, this burden, you wanted to do something great. It was just so much harder than you thought it was going to be. It might be restoring the marriage. It might be saving your family. It might be building a business. It might be doing community work. It might be doing social work. It might be doing kingdom building work. It might be disciple making. It might be taking care of the poor. Whatever it is, it is just so much harder than you thought it was going to be.

That's where we are now. The wow has worn off. Now what do you do? Now what do you do? Let's take a look and see what Nehemiah does. Verse six, this is what Nehemiah did. "When I heard their outcry and these charges I was very angry. I was very angry." Notice that it does not say, "When I heard their outcry on these charges I threw out my hands in despair and said, 'I quit.'".

The first thing we learn when the wow wears off is don't shrink from bad news. Nehemiah did not shrink from bad news. Now, I will tell you, I can certainly relate, in the open I was talking about over idealism and then over cynicism, but I can tell you I have felt it, you have felt it, we have all at different points gotten bad news and wanted to run away. Often we maybe do run away or have a pity party. The bottom line is that the way to deal with having lost the wow factor is to not shrink from bad news. Do we see any other places in the Bible, for example? Of course we do. There is some problem that threatens the mission, that threatens the vision, that just sucks the wow out of it. Just one example is the early church when the movement was just getting started to build the church and the book of Acts and the Grecian widows were being shorted in the distribution of food. It was not unlike what Nehemiah was going through. It was a threat. It was a threat that was taking the wow, sucking the wow out of it, just putting the whole thing at risk.

What do you do? What do you do? I'm asking you literally, don't hold your hands up or anything like that, but what do you do when you get the bad news? What do you do when you find out that there is rubble everywhere? There's debris from the previous effort. The people that I'm trying to help, they're abusing each other. They're charging exorbitant interest rates, they're bankrupting each other and not only that, the economy is in the tank. This is like famine going on, this big recession. How do you do that? How do you do... Do you shrink from it, or do you meet it head on? If you don't meet it head on, do you remember what it was like when you used to love to get angry? You used to love to attack these problems. I'm here to tell you that the Holy Spirit can put that back in you, but it's your choice. You have to let Him do that.

These were bottlenecks. These were the bottlenecks that threatened to bring down Nehemiah's vision of rebuilding the country. You have these different bottlenecks, things that are holding you back.

Everybody knows what a bottleneck is, right? We all know what a bottleneck is because we've all worked for one. We've all had somebody we work for and they were a bottleneck. Things are moving along really well and they got to this guy or this gal, usually a guy, and then bam. Everything came to a screeching halt. We all know what a bottleneck is. All of these things that Nehemiah was facing, all these things that you are facing, these are bottlenecks that threaten your mission, the thing you're trying to rebuild.

This should just be obvious to you, but unfixed bottlenecks discourage people. Unfixed bottlenecks just discourage people. These people, some of them have already lost the wow, but they're all in danger of losing their wow and becoming discouraged unless Nehemiah comes and does something to fix them. The problem is you can't deal with everything at once. Nehemiah's systematically going through these things one bottleneck at a time. Here's the big idea for us. What one bottleneck if removed will most accelerate you toward your goal? What's the one bottleneck that if you can get that out of your life, if you can get that out of your world, will most accelerate you toward your goal? You can't deal with everything at once. Nehemiah's not trying to deal with everything at once.

The next thing we see in Nehemiah is that he removes the bottleneck that's holding him back and so we'll be talking about removing the bottleneck that's holding you back. Verse seven, he's angry in six, verse seven, what does he do about it? How does he get rid of the bottleneck? Bottlenecks. "I pondered them in my mind, all of these things. The exorbitant interest rates, the suffocating taxes, the big recession because of the famine, gosh there's so many things I can't remember them all. I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen." I called together a large meeting to deal with them and said, "As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers only for them to be sold back to us." They kept quiet because they could find nothing to say and so I continued. "What you are doing, it's just not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain."

Okay, get it? He's loaning, too. He's loaning money and grain. Let the exacting of usury stop these exorbitant interest rates. Give back to them immediately, their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses and also the usury you are charging them the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil. They complied. They said, "We will give it back. They took an oath to do it and assembly praised the lord. The people did as they promised.

Nehemiah, if you'd had been there you might have made a different decision. You'd have been wrong, but Nehemiah in his judgment decided that the one thing that was most holding back rebuilding the country was this usury. The people taking advantage of each other. They were rebuilding the wall, reestablishing their security. That was the number one thing he decided to do, but that now he's deep into it and the wow was starting to go away because he had this unfixed bottleneck that's discouraging people so he has to fix that bottleneck. What is that bottleneck? The bottleneck is people can handle the recession. They might even be able to handle the suffocating tax. There's an extra 20% tax being charged to the people. They might even be able to handle that. What they can't handle is just their brothers taking advantage of them. This is the bottleneck that he decided to remove.

In the scriptures these things happen. In Acts chapter eight, there's this great persecution. Saul was involved in persecuting the church. The great commission had been given by Jesus in Acts chapter one verse eight, part of it. You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you'll be my

witnesses. In Judea, Samaria, Jerusalem, Samaria and the outermost part of the world, right? Jesus went away and what did the disciples do? They huddled up in Jerusalem. They huddled up. They weren't doing anything. God is in the position of Nehemiah, he's got a bottleneck. He's got this vision to rebuild or to build his kingdom and he's got a bottleneck. He's got all the people that are supposed to be doing the work huddled up in Jerusalem. God, in his wisdom allows a persecution. In Acts chapter eight you can read it. There's this persecution that broke out and the Bible says the disciples were scattered all over the world in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the outermost parts of earth. They were scattered. Acts chapter eight verse one and following. It says wherever they went they preached the gospel.

God is in the business of breaking up these bottlenecks and helping us do it and doing it for us when we don't do it ourselves. We saw how Nehemiah did it here. He got the leaders of the people to all agree to stop charging these exorbitant interest rates and it worked. The question is, what is the bottleneck that's holding you back in your marriage? You already know what you need to do. You already know what you want to do and you know what you need to do. I'm just looking you in the eye right now to say, "Why aren't you doing it? Why aren't you doing it?" I'm glad you come here, but you're not coming here to figure out what God wants you to do. You already know that. You're coming here to get encouragement because of all these bottlenecks that you're facing. Unfixed bottlenecks discourage people. We're coming for encouragement. We're coming for hope. You're not coming here because you don't know what to do, so what's the bottleneck? What's the bottleneck for you that if removed could change everything? That's the big idea. What bottleneck, if removed, would most accelerate you toward your goal?

Is this awesome? Is Nehemiah awesome? Am I awesome? Alright. Then sustaining the change. Verse fourteen. "Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah." By the way, this is the first time he's actually mentioned right? He was the governor, okay? He had positional power. He had positional power. Even though he had positional power he still had these problems. He was governor there until the thirty second year, so twelve years. He says, "Neither I, nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor."

You want to sustain change? Set the example. "The earlier governors, those preceding me, placed the heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them at addition to food and wine." There's the suffocating tax, you see. These people have been under the suffocating tax burden. There assistants also lorded it over the people, but out of reverence for God, I did not act like that. I did not act like that. Are you the leader in the thing that you're trying to build? You need to look at what the bottlenecks are, what the offenses are, and you need to say, "I don't act like that. I don't do that. That's not who I am." If you're part of the movement, you need to be able to say, "Hmm. I don't do the things that those other people that are in this movement for the wrong reasons, I don't do those things."

Verse sixteen. "Instead I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work. We did not acquire any land." You might be able to do deals, do some deals, but sometimes it's not a bad idea to not do deals. I'm going to tell you something, and I'm even still debating whether or not to tell you this but, when I went into ministry, and I did this because I had the ability to do it, for the first sixteen years I took no salary. No salary. I take a half salary now. I needed to do that for me, just to make sure that my motives were right. That I was not one of those people who was in it for the wrong reason. I love, I've always loved business. I've always loved doing deals. I love making money. I don't even care what happens after it's made. I just like the idea of putting the deals together.

That's what Nehemiah's doing. He said, "I just didn't acquire any land. I didn't want to personally enrich myself by doing this." You want to sustain the change? Set the example. "Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table as well as those who came from surrounding nations." It says, drop down a couple sentences, "In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor because the demands were heavy on these people. Remember me with favor, oh my God, for all I have done for these people."

It's interesting, one of the reasons I wanted to start this series and do this series with you, I captured the essence of it afresh this morning. I was getting ready last minute and I was reading somewhere in this book, *Pastoring Men*. Here it is under sustainability. Lots of really great initially well executed ideas bomb. I said at the beginning of this series that two thirds of all change initiatives fail outright, whether public, private, profit, or nonprofit. That's almost an iron law. Two thirds of the things you start will fail. Whether it's a quality improvement program, a new product, a new business, whatever. It's just almost like an iron law. The question is, what are those one third who are succeeding doing differently than those two thirds who fail?

That's what this is about. I'm showing you the principles. I'm basically giving you the layman's version of my PhD dissertation on leadership and organizational change. That's what I'm really doing. Sustaining the idea is the meat of the coconut. By a wide margin, the reason pastors or, insert the word leaders, by a wide margin the reason pastors get so frustrated with pastoring men is the degree of difficulty they have sustaining ministries to men. After the initial flush of enthusiasm, the wow, someone has to keep men's discipleship ministry center stage until it becomes enfolded into the routines of the church. The research reveals that someone is the pastor, or in your case the research reveals that someone is you, the leader. The pastor is the key to everything. The leader is the key to everything. That includes sustainability. It is your vision, your determination, your sustainable energy that will make ministry to men last or whatever it is that you're trying to build. Without your personal involvement, ministry to men probably won't happen. That's just reality.

It will come as no surprise that the churches effective in men's discipleship know how to sustain momentum and the others do not. This idea of sustaining change, it's the number one problem in men's ministry and ministry to men. It's also the number one problem in rebuilding whatever it is you're doing. Keeping the romance in the marriage, keeping the excitement of new products and new services rolling out on a regular basis, new products and new services in your business to keep it vibrant and exciting so that you don't end up with bottlenecks and lose the wow.

The word I think best describes the attitude of the pastor successful in reaching men, the word that I think best describes the attitude of the pastors who are successful in leading men or the leaders who are successful in doing these things is determination. It's determination. They just wouldn't take no for an answer. I studied these churches that were good and effective and these churches that were failing and I compared them and said, "Okay, what are the ones that are successful doing differently than the ones that are failing?" One of the three main things was determination. These pastors, they were just absolutely determined that men's discipleship is going to work here. We're going to make this happen. It was trusting God, but it was taking responsibility. It was not, "I'm going to do this in the glory of my own strength. I'm going to do this in the power of the Holy Spirit, but I am called to do this. This is my burden. Because it is my burden I'm not going to sit by and watch this country burn anymore. I'm not going to sit by and watch men's lives go up in flames anymore. I'm not going to take it. It's on me. I am determined to make this happen."

That's how you got to be, otherwise - Nehemiah said, "I did not act like that" – otherwise, you're just "acting like that." You know me, I don't try, my goal is not to get you amped up, jacked up, revved up, and go out of here say, "I'm going to conquer the world." in your own strength. We want everything that we do to flow out of the gospel of Jesus. We want everything we do to flow out of the gospel of Jesus. We don't want to want things to flow out of the gospel of Jesus so much that we don't get amped up, that we don't get revved up and jacked up, and we don't get fired up. We do want to be that way, but we want to be that way because of what God is doing in us.

How can you sustain change once the wow wears off? You can be the guy. You can take responsibility. You can set the example. You can lead out. You can do that in a very practical way by figuring out what is the bottleneck. Identify the bottleneck. Don't duck it. Don't shrink from bad news. Then remove that one bottleneck. If you have an assembly line ... Oh, this message is going to take longer by another two minutes. If you have an assembly line. I didn't think in advance, but let me just borrow three bottles here, or three cups. Okay, so let's just say this is an assembly line. On this assembly line, this operation is slowing down your production process by one hour a day. If you could fix that you would increase or accelerate toward your goal, the big idea, what one bottleneck if removed will most accelerate you toward your goal. If you could fix this bottleneck, you'll have a one-hour acceleration toward your goal. However, this operation is slowing down your production line two hours a day. This operation's slowing down your production three hours a day. This is slowing you down one hour a day, this is slowing you down two hours a day, and this is slowing you down three hours a day. You have three problems. You have three bottlenecks and they all need to be fixed, right? Right? They all need to be fixed, right?

No, they don't. There's only one bottleneck right now that needs to be fixed. It's this one because if you can accelerate by an hour a day you can still be three hours behind, right? Which one? That's right. There's only one bottleneck that is actually most holding you back at any given time. You have a limited amount of resources, limited amount of time to inspire and motivate people to ... Nehemiah picked usury. What is it for you? What is the one bottleneck, that if you could remove it will most accelerate you towards your goal? Starting to drink that juice, but I realized it's not mine.

There it is. Just say to yourself, "I just don't want to be like that. I don't want to be that guy. I want to be this other guy. I want to be like Nehemiah." Let's pray. Our dearest Father Lord, I know that everything I've ever learned about leadership and management change can be traced right back in here to this book. I just pray that you'd continue to help make this alive to me and to the men and that you would help us not just know these principles, but the concept here is that this is a step by step guide to actually do something. Help us each do something with it. In Jesus name, Amen.