

A Step-By-Step Guide For Rebuilding a Country

Is America Ripe for Another Great Awakening?

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. Let's go ahead and begin with a shout out. I'm very excited about the shout out for today because it's going to a group led by Dick Reed. Dick Reed sat at Tom Hollingsworth's table for 15 years, right? Then his son, Rick sits at John Anderson's table there. Dick has started a group recently with eight guys. Yeah, how about this? This is cool. With eight guys, meet at the church Thursdays at 7:00 pm at the Community United Methodist Church in DeBarry and John Williams is your area director and so I'm going to start something new this morning.

Gosh, you know, we do the applause, welcome them and the one, two, three hurrah. All you guys, there are 6000 downloads of our bible study somewhere around the world every week, and we've never invited you online to join us in welcoming the new group and do the hurrah. Starting today, today is the day. From now on when we welcome the new group we want you who are online to also join with us and welcome them with applause and then give you a chance to do the hurrah. Whether you're in a small group, and many of you are or you're doing this on your own. You might look a little weird if you're doing it on your own, but if you want to, that would be great to have you join us for that as well.

With that said, would you help me in joining the CMC men's group with a rousing robust warm Man in the Mirror welcome. One, two, three, hurrah. Welcome, guys, we are very honored to have you with us, Dick. That's great. Okay, so we're doing a series. This series is a step by step guide for rebuilding a country. We're taking a look at the book of Nehemiah, and you know there's quite a bit of discussion these days about what a divided country we are. Even if that's not as true as some people want to make it sound, it certainly does seem to dominate public discourse. I was actually talking with my literary agent yesterday and he was going on about how we're a divided country, and I was thinking wow that's interesting because this guy's an intellectual.

It's out there and it's being talked about. The Bible says however that a kingdom divided against itself will waste away and a house divided against itself will fall. With that in mind, I want us to take a look at how Nehemiah addresses this issue of a house that is divided against itself. This guy's off to a great start. Just to review, we talked about the first step in rebuilding a country or as a metaphor for whatever other thing you try to rebuild, that the first step to every great outcome is to imagine its possibility. We talked about how prayer is the way to develop a vision, and then we talked about the three things you'll need to get started. You'll need the right people, the right resources, the right plan. Then preparation, without prayer is presumption, but also likewise, prayer without preparation is presumption.

Put these things in the right place and we saw Nehemiah did that. We talked about creating early momentum, the big idea. Dream unbelievably big but start believably small. Then we just talked about always making sure you have the next step believably small. We talked about opposition, the three keys

that Nehemiah employed to overcome opposition. Expect it, trust God and then take responsibility. Then sooner or later the wow factor starts to wear off and then what do you do when that happens? The big idea, what one bottle neck if removed would accelerate you toward your goal. We talked about that. Then last time, we talked about what getting a quick win can do for you, and we talked about how nothing turns doubters into allies faster than a quick win and the rebuilding of the wall in 52 days.

Now what? Now what? How is Nehemiah going to sustain this momentum? He's got this quick win. How is he going to keep it going? The title of today's message is this. Is America Ripe for a Great Awakening? What's happening, what's going to be happening here in Nehemiah chapter 8 and following is we're going to look at Nehemiah helping his nation take a turn toward God. There's been a lot of excitement. They've gotten these early wins, but the question would be: is human wisdom and human ingenuity all you need to make a country rebuilt, to rebuild a country?

Is that enough to sustain the momentum that's begun here, this human ingenuity and this wisdom? Well it is good. It is good, up to a point. Proverbs chapter 16, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps. All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord. Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed." You can pull yourself up by your bootstraps and get so far, but if you really want to go all the way and really rebuild the whole thing and when the wow wears off and after the enthusiasm of the first few quick wins wears off, where does the power come to keep it going? Where does the power come from to sustain the change?

First thing I want us to talk about this morning is just this idea, you know what is a spiritual revival and awakening? It was December of 1734, and a young pastor named Jonathan Edwards had taken over a church in Northampton Massachusetts. He had been laboring feverishly, but after many months had seen no fruit. Then all of a sudden in December, five or six converts were made. One of them was a young woman who Jonathan Edwards reported was one of the greatest company keepers in the city. I think that might be a metaphor. He was terrified because he thought that her conversion would douse the new enthusiasm for the gospel, but instead exactly the opposite happened, and the gospel caught on and in the short span of a few months, six months, 300 people were converted to Jesus, watch this, in a town with a total population of 1100.

Well there were only 900,000 colonists at the time. News of this spread like wildfire, and just within a matter of a few months, there were similar revivals taking place in 100 cities throughout the colonies. George Whitfield came along and began his preaching. It's said that as many as 80% of all the colonists at some point heard George Whitfield preach the gospel, and it was on. That was, that has come to be known in history as the First Great Awakening. We've had many others. For those of you who are interested in this kind of thing, I did a brief history of spiritual revival and awakening. I wrote an article. It's footnoted, like 53 footnotes, so it has some, it's robust scholastically. You could go to patrickmorley.com. You can type in brief history or you can type in revival, revival and awakening, any combination and it will get you to the article.

Here's what people said of Jonathan Edwards and his revival. It pleased God to display his free and sovereign mercy in the conversion of a great multitude of souls in a short space of time. Turning them from a formal cold and careless profession of Christianity to the lively exercise of every Christian grace and the powerful practice of our holy religion. Not a bad definition of what a revival is.

It's important to say however though that the problem is that spiritual revivals and awakenings can't be manufactured. They are sovereign works of grace by a God who dispenses revivals and awakenings on

his timetable according to His will and His plan. By the way, revivals and awakenings, the word revival, the word awakening, these are pretty much interchangeable words. Typically, revivals tend to be more localized. Once revival starts to envelope more and more geography, maybe a whole country, this is probably when the word awakening starts to be added to it, but they're pretty much interchangeable and you can use them that way if you would like.

They can't be manufactured. They're sovereign acts of God. What an awakening or a revival is, it's when God supernaturally does something in the lives of people in such a short span of time that it would otherwise never be possible to happen. Now I ask you, do you have any doubt, do you have any doubt whatsoever that the problems that we face as a divided nation or maybe it's your house that's divided, maybe it's between you and your spouse, or maybe it's between you and your kids, maybe it's between your kids and your spouse, or maybe it's siblings. Whatever it is, or maybe it's in your place of work.

Oh man, I'm still trying to work through my camper punch list thing and I would just, honestly, now you talk about a company divided, I picked it up this week and honestly nothing that I asked to be done was done. 26 items, 27 items on the punch list. Nothing's done. I'm on my third service tech in two weeks. The last one quit. Actually I'm not on my third one yet. They haven't assigned on yet. I walked out of there and I said, well what do we do now? They said, we don't know we'll get back to you. I think, you know, no wonder I'm waking up in the middle of the night, right?

A company divided against itself is doomed. Can you picture any way of ever healing a nation that feels like it's divided by deregulation? By balancing the budget? By paying back the debt? Are these things essential to long term health? Absolutely. Is this the essence of what it means to heal a divided country? Absolutely not. Can you picture any possible way of ever bringing unity back to whatever it is that you're trying to rebuild apart from a wholesale spiritual revival and awakening?

Apart from God's supernatural intervention to in a very short period of time to do that which would otherwise not be possible, it's not possible. And so when people talk about the problems being so overwhelming that they have no solutions and there are a lot of people who are writing articles like that at 3:00 am in the morning these days. No, I'm not that guy. Other people are doing it. There are a lot of people who don't think these problems can be solved.

As in the book of Exodus, God sent Moses, he sent a man, he wants to send you, he wants you to be a Moses, but he sent Moses to a man to say let my people go. I want to rebuild my people. Let my people go. I'm going to send you. He even told Moses, and then I'm going to harden the pharaoh's heart. There's this kind of like cumulative effect of these 10 plagues that, you know even the first three plagues, the magicians of Egypt were able to replicate them and make the water of the Nile turn to blood and so forth, but by the time the sixth, seventh, eighth plagues came along, the cumulative effect of that was very powerful. It was very powerful.

God orchestrated all of those failed attempts so that he, he tells us right in the scripture why, so that he could put his power on display. That's what God wants to do in your situation, the thing you're trying to rebuild, the thing that seems, it just wants to stay divided. It doesn't want to come back together. It doesn't want to work. God is in the process of setting the table so that he can rebuild, so that he can bring revival, so that he can bring awakening, hopefully to our whole nation.

It's such a powerful act of His sovereignty and grace and mercy in such a way that only He can get the glory, only He can get the praise. The problem of course is that He's the only one that can do it. We can't manufacture a spiritual revival and awakening. We can't do that, so what, what if anything can we do? Do we just sit around and feel bad about what's going on in our marriage, in our business, in our lives, in our families, in our country, in our community, in our church? Do you sit around and wait for God to do His thing?

Well, in one sense, yes, but there is something that we can do to hasten the day, and that's really what Nehemiah is going to show us today. Here's the big idea for the day. Only God can send revival, but we can hasten the day through humble repentant prayer. Only God can send revival but we can hasten the day through humble repentant prayer.

We're going to be at Nehemiah chapter 8. You want to go back one sentence where it says, "When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled as one man in the square before the water gate." We're going to take a look now at Nehemiah's great awakening. The people told Ezra the scribe to bring out the book of the law of Moses which the Lord commanded for Israel. Isn't it fascinating now. Why all of a sudden are these people asking ... It says they told or they asked. They asked Ezra to bring out the Word and teach them the Word of God. Why did the people do this? This is a people who had in many cases, they had turned their back on God.

Well, part of the genius of the vision that God gave to Nehemiah was that sometimes, sometimes because of their own mistakes and sins, people get so down, they're so low that they need some good news just to get them up enough so that they can actually have hope that God can do something. There are people, I'm sure you know some of them, but there are people in this community and every community, they're so down, they've lost hope. Sometimes you actually have to bring people some good news to give them enough hope that they can reach out for God, so that they ... I'm actually dealing with somebody in personal ministry one on one right now, who when I started with this guy, he was so depressed, he didn't, he had lost all hope, all hope that God could ever do anything, that God even cared. He completely lost hope.

Then a few nice things have happened to him. A few good things have happened to him and we've been able to talk about how this is the way, these are things that God is doing to begin to restore him. You can see just, honestly it's just like in the last one month, just begin to see a glimmer of hope in him. This is what Nehemiah has done here.

The people asked him to read because they now have been given a little hope because they've seen the wall rebuilt. They've seen the security of their capital city restored. That's what Nehemiah has done. Let's read and find out exactly what happened here. It says in verse 3, "He read it, the Word, aloud from daybreak to noon." Over at verse 8 "Ezra and others read from the Book of the Law of God making it clear and giving them meaning so that the people could understand what was being read." Then it says down in the last half of verse 9, "For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law as the power of the Word of God came upon them through the Holy Spirit."

Then watch Nehemiah. They are being laid out by the Word of God, but Nehemiah continues to give them hope. "Go on and enjoy choice food, sweet drinks. Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength," verse 10. Then in verse 11, "Be still for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve. Celebrate with great joy. They did this for eight days. They listened to Ezra." Verse 18 of chapter 8, "Day after day from the

first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly."

What you're seeing here, is you are seeing the efficacy of the Word of God. Fancy word. It works. Isaiah 55, is it 11? "My Word which goes out from my mouth will not return empty but will achieve what I desire and the purpose for which I sent it." This is the thing about the Word of God. I tremble, I tremble at the thought of having to stand in front of you and speak and come up with something that has power and authority and veracity and volume and momentum. It terrifies me, but I know that if I am teaching you the Word of God, then I know that there is gravitas here. The weight of the Word of the sovereign God will speak to you.

If I had to come up with a message for you, well I'm just going to sleep in. But this, this is a powerful message and that's what was happening here to these people. They had heard the Word of God and then so, in chapter 9, it says "On the 24th day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads, those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers as well."

The Word of God brought these people to a point of national repentance. National repentance. Then the rest of chapter 9 basically gives one of the great histories of the people of Israel. You know there's this, throughout the Old Testament, there is this cycle, this pattern that repeats itself over and over again and it starts with prosperity, and I'm not just talking material prosperity but I'm talking holistic prosperity. Just a season of well-being if you want to call it that. You see this cycle that God blesses His people. There is prosperity and what follows prosperity immediately? Rebellion. Every time. A sense of self-sufficiency. Pride of heart. Deuteronomy 8, thinking that I am what I am because I did it by myself and on my own. You have this rebellion.

What follows is rebellion and every case is discipline. And what follows discipline along with all the suffering and hardship that goes with it and the feelings that we're divided we'll never be better and things will never get better, what follows that? Repentance. When people finally are brought to a point, I'm probably skipping a few steps in here but just so we don't have 80 steps, but a repentance takes place. Then what happens after this repentance takes place? God sends revival. God sends revival. What happens after revival? Prosperity. And then what happens after prosperity? We begin the cycle again with rebellion and discipline and so forth.

You see this in this chapter 9, in more than one place, but in verse 22. This is a prayer, "You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting to them even the remotest frontiers." Verse 23, "You made their sons as numerous as the stars in the sky and you brought them into the light." Prosperity. Then, verse twenty ... I wrote over it. 26, "but, they were disobedient and rebelled against you." Rebellion. Verse 27, "So you handed them over to their enemies." The discipline. "But when they were oppressed they cried out to you." There's the repentance. "From heaven you heard them and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers who rescued them." There's the return to prosperity.

Then in the next verse, but as soon as they were at rest, they again did what you, what was evil in your sight, and started the cycle all over again. This is, we're still in this period where the people are being instructed in the word of God and now they're in a prayer. This is a great historical prayer. Then in verse 32 of chapter 9, "Now therefore oh our great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps His covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes." Verse 33, "In all that has happened to us, you

have been faithful, you have been just while we did wrong. Our kings and leaders, our priests, our fathers, they did not follow your law. They did not pay attention to your commands. Even while they were in their kingdom enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways." Sound familiar?

"But see we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave to our forefathers. We need revival. So they could eat its fruits and the other good things it produces, because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress, oh God." That is the result that came out of hearing this great Word of God, this sense of now wanting to repent, to repent. It led them to do their part. Leads us to do our part.

Our part is to, 2 Chronicles 7:14, who knows it? "If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land." You see? That's our part. That's our part. Humility and repentance and then there's this pledge of obedience that takes place. We don't have time to go into this in detail, but in verse 29 of chapter 10, "All these now joined their brothers, the nobles and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all of the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our God."

You know people who are cultural Christians, they recoil at this idea of obedience, of that somebody else could tell me how I would live my life. The biblical Christian understands that this is a safety net. This is a protection, and then he goes on and he gives three examples here. We won't go into them but in this case keeping the Sabbath, tithes and offerings and not intermarrying with the culture, the rest of chapter 10 there.

Again, the big idea, only God, only God can send revival, but we can hasten the day with humble repentant prayer. We do have a role. We can play a part. We can actually hasten the day. Then finally, you know what can you do now? What can you do to hasten the day? Well one thing you can do is just to be careful where you put your faith. To put your faith in the grace and the mercy of the almighty sovereign God, the one who is the One, that can manufacture revival and awakening. Do you want to work through institutions, human institutions in order to make a better life? Absolutely. They're God's institutions. He instituted them. That's where they came from. Governments and families and churches. Absolutely. Work through them.

But our faith is not in institutions. Our faith is the power of the gospel of Jesus. That's where our faith is. He is the only one who can send revival, but we do have this power, this ability to hasten the day, but not if we put our faith in the institutions and not if we put our hope in institutions. The hope that I was talking about earlier in this message. This is not the first time we've been divided. You know, you read things and you come away with impressions. Wow this is the worst thing that's ever happened. Hey, I'll tell you what was a divided country. How about the Civil War? How about Vietnam? How about the Civil Rights Era? All of these are times of great division in our country.

There were people in each generation. There was a civil war revival. You know that? 600,000 troops, roughly the same number on each side of the Confederacy and the Union who came to Jesus. All these young men, it was said during the Civil War that they went off to war and they went morally berserk. It was a disaster but God sent revival because there were people there who were humbly and repentantly in prayer. In that vein, what can you do to hasten the day? Work through institutions but put your faith in God because only God can send revival.

Remember we can hasten the day with humble repentant prayer. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your ... I don't know, symmetrical Word, just how even with all of the mystery in it, the mystery of your providence and the secret things that belong to you, the revealed things that you have given to us are magnificent. They are so extraordinary and this principle that you want to send revival, you want to bring awakening but as a response to people humbling themselves under your discipline. Repenting and so Lord we pray that we would be, yeah, sure that we would work but that also we would pray. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.