

“Sifting Through The Ashes”

Nehemiah 1 * January 10, 2010

I. Why use Nehemiah for a series called “How To Build A Life?”
Nehemiah is all about taking a life and an existence that is in _____ and
turning it into something _____ and purposeful.

Background to the book of Nehemiah:

Who was Nehemiah? And what do we know about him?

3 Attitudes We Must Have For Launching Life-Change

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

Attitude #1 – An attitude of _____.

A. *What do we mean by this?*

B. *Is there a way to feel this in an unholy way?*

C. *How do we come by holy discontent?*

It comes when we begin asking _____
_____ about our lives.

D. *Did Nehemiah have to ask these questions? (Where was he living at the time?)*

**Attitude #2 – An attitude of showing personal _____
and _____.**

A. *How do we see this in Nehemiah’s act of fasting?*

B. *Though we are saved by grace, not works, what is expected of us after salvation comes to us?*

C. *The first Jews who went back after the exile seemed to think it was enough just to “show up”. Was that true?*

D. *What lessons are here for me to learn?*

**Attitude #3 – The attitude of looking to God for his _____
and _____ each and every step of the way.**

A. *Philippians 2:12-13. “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

What’s the right way to understand this verse? Do we get the process started and then God comes on board?

B. *In his praying, Nehemiah acknowledges three truths we should always keep close to us:*

1. *That he is utterly _____ on God.*

2. *That he is utterly _____ & _____.*

3. *That God is _____ enough to rebuild a life when all other hope is gone.*

a. *What’s the condition though?*

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Nehemiah was truly a great man, very much cut from the same cloth as Moses or David or Daniel.

3 Attitudes We Must Have For Launching Life-Change

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

Attitude #1 – An attitude of holy discontent.

A. What do we mean by this?

Nehemiah says that upon hearing that state of affairs back in the holy city he sat down and wept. He mourned. Life change seldom can begin until you experience a similar sensation in side of you. The sensation that something is wrong and it has to be changed, it must be changed now!

B. Is there a way to feel this in an unholy way?

Some people feel discontent with their lives, disgust with their lives, and immediately launch into behaviors that are self-destructive and harmful. They fall into depression. They turn to alcohol or meth. They resort to violence, against themselves or others. They pursue the affair. There are an endless number of sinful ways to take our disgust with life and make things a thousand times worse.

C. How do we come by holy discontent?

It comes when we begin asking honest questions about our lives.

D. Did Nehemiah have to ask these questions? (Where was he living at the time?)

According to verse 1, where did Nehemiah live? He lived in the “citadel of Susa”. What’s a citadel? It’s a place that is secure and safe and comfortable. Nehemiah had a very good gig going here, being the cupbearer to the king. His life was set. Easy street. His address was Rodeo Dr, Beverly Hills. He had no worries. Most people spend their entire lives just trying to get where Nehemiah was at. Spend their entire lives attempting to build up their own citadels – to get to a place where they think they’ll be secure, safe, comfortable. Nehemiah was there, he was living it, but he knew that there was more to life than this. He knew God had a higher

I. Why use Nehemiah for a series called “How To Build A Life?”

Nehemiah is all about taking a life and an existence that is in ruins and turning it into something beautiful and purposeful.

Background to the book of Nehemiah:

Back around 600 B.C. the armies of Babylon came and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and took its people, God’s people, into exile. God allowed his people to have what they wanted – a life without him, a life without his favor and his protection. The exile lasted seventy years – something God told them in advance through the prophet Jeremiah. And then, God miraculously opened the door for the Jews to return to their own land when the Persian army destroyed the Babylonian army in 539 B.C. and the Persian king gave them the green light to go back. And return they did, in waves, they came back to Jerusalem. They rebuilt the temple which was completed in 516 B.C., and then began the work of rebuilding the city. But at some point the Jewish people got stuck, and the rebuilding came to a halt. It wasn’t just the temple that needed to be rebuilt. Arguably the most important thing a city needed back in those days was a wall built around it. A wall was needed for protection, and for pride. A wall let the world know that this was a strong, vibrant city. And Jerusalem’s walls remained in ruins 90 years later during Nehemiah’s time.

Who was Nehemiah? And what do we know about him?

He is a devout Jew, who loved God, and who was providentially raised up by God to become the cupbearer of the Persian king. One of the most powerful positions in all the empire was occupied by a man of real faith. What’s more, we learn something of Nehemiah’s character by the sole fact that he was the cupbearer to the king. Why to be a cupbearer to the king meant the king was putting his life in your hands. And so you needed to be a man of distinction and education for one, to be able to keep company with royalty, but more importantly, you had to be a man of integrity and trustworthiness. Nehemiah has a high and holy pedigree.

purpose for him than just being rich, or being comfortable, or being safe. So he asked those questions, and he allowed the honest answers he got back to trouble him, upset him.

Attitude #2 – An attitude of showing personal commitment and fasting.

A. How do we see this in Nehemiah's act of fasting?

Because fasting is a difficult practice that asks a lot of effort from the one who does it.

B. Though we are saved by grace, not works, what is expected of us after salvation comes to us?

But salvation by grace alone should never be understood to mean that God expects no effort from us on the other side of salvation. Once we are saved, God expects a great deal from us. "He who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God," Jesus said.

C. The first Jews who went back after the exile seemed to think it was enough just to "show up". Was that true?

It's not enough just to accept Christ, be baptized, then show up at church. You need to take some ownership of your life-change. "Showing up" is not enough. Those who just show up and do not also grow up will inevitably find their lives blowing up.

D. What lessons are here for me to learn?

Don't ask God to prosper you if you're not prepared to get a job. Don't ask God to heal you if you're not willing to take care of your body. Don't ask God to take your addiction away if you're not willing to enter the treatment program and be accountable to anyone. Don't ask God to heal your marriage and say, "But change my spouse first." You've got to take the field. And those who cultivate that attitude will, like Nehemiah, be used of God to do mighty things. They will know the power of God in ways that others do not.

Attitude #3 – The attitude of looking to God for his presence and power each and every step of the way.

A. Philippians 2:12-13. "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

What's the right way to understand this verse? Do we get the process started and then God comes on board?

We might be tempted to look at this verse and say, "We have to get the process started, then God comes on board," but that would be incorrect. Benjamin Franklin said, "The Lord helps those who help themselves." But that's not what Paul is saying here. Because the very act of desiring to change, and the moving of my will to change is supported and encouraged by God. Did you see that? "It is God who works in you to *will*" this change. Even though we have to give it our all, it's grace each and every step of the way. Even before the very thought births inside of me to change, God is there, cheering me on. Nudging me forward.

B. In his praying, Nehemiah acknowledges three truths we should always keep close to us:

1. That he is utterly dependent on God.

2. That he is utterly broken & sinful.

3. That God is powerful enough to rebuild a life when all other hope is gone.

a. What's the condition though?

You've got to return to him. You've got to repent of the paths you have chosen and the choices you've made. And you've got to learn how to do it God's way from here on out. To obey him. Only in returning, and repenting and doing it God's way will you find the rest that you're looking for.