



30-DAY DEVOTIONAL

INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH

WHO WROTE THE BOOK?

Nehemiah is the author of the historical book. Much of the book is written from his 1st person perspective. Nothing is known about his youth or background; we meet him as an adult serving in the Persian royal court as the personal cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11-2:1). The prestigious position reveals something of Nehemiah's upright character. Though he remained in Persia after the exiles had been allowed to go home, he was highly interested in the state of affairs in Judah (his brother Hanani [1:2] had returned there earlier). The book of Nehemiah could be read as a sequel to the book of Ezra, and most scholars believe the two were originally one work. It is possible that Ezra compiled Nehemiah's original accounts with other material to create the book of Nehemiah. However, most scholars believe Nehemiah wrote the book.

WHEN AND WHERE?

The book of Nehemiah opens in the Persian city of Susa in the year 444 BC. Later that year, Nehemiah traveled to Israel, leading the third of three returns by the Jewish people following their seventy years of exile in Babylon. (The previous chapter of Ezra describes the earlier two returns.) Most of the book centers on the events in Jerusalem. The narrative concludes around the year 430 BC, and scholars believe the book was written shortly thereafter.

Nehemiah is the last historical book of the Old Testament. Although the book of Esther appears after Nehemiah in the canon, the events in Esther occurred in the time period between Ezra 6 and 7, between the first and second returns of the people to Israel. The prophet Malachi was a contemporary of Nehemiah.

WHY IS NEHEMIAH SO IMPORTANT?

Nehemiah was a layman, not a priest like Ezra, nor a prophet like Malachi. He served the Persian king in a secular position before leading a group of Jews to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the city wall. Nehemiah's expertise in the king's court equipped him for the political and physical reconstruction necessary for the remnant to survive.

Under Nehemiah's leadership, the Jews withstood opposition and came together to accomplish their goal. Nehemiah led by example, giving up a respected position in a palace for hard labor in a politically insignificant district. He partnered with Ezra, who also appears in this book, to solidify the political and spiritual foundation for the people. He did not claim glory for himself but always gave God the credit for his successes.

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Nehemiah recorded the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem, Judah's capital city. Together, he and Ezra, who led the spiritual revival of the people, directed the political and religious restoration of the Jews in their homeland after the Babylonian captivity.

Nehemiah's life provides a fine study on leadership. He overcame opposition from outsiders as well as internal turmoil. He exercised administrative skills in his strategy to use half the people for building while the other half kept watch for the Samaritans who, under Sanballat, threatened attack (Nehemiah 4-7). As governor, Nehemiah negotiated peace among the Jews who were unhappy with the Persian taxes. He exhibited a steadfast determination to complete his goals. Accomplishing those goals resulted in a people encouraged, renewed, and excited about their future.

DAY 1

TITLE: *Wide Awake*

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:1-2

"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. ***Now it happened*** in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem."

OBSERVATION

Have you ever been in a room full of people and been completely unaware of what was happening around you? Many times we are surrounded by people and are unaware of the pain and heartache they are going through. It is easy in life to only be concerned with our own world. We focus on how things are going for us and the people with whom we interact on a daily basis. In this passage of scripture, Nehemiah could have been consumed by his own world. He was the king's cupbearer, a very important role with a long list of responsibilities. In the midst of all of this, he is able to be "wide awake" to other people's problems. The scripture says "now it happened." Nehemiah was aware enough to realize that something significant was happening around him. He was the kind of person who was unwilling to live in denial or for his own comfort.

It is easy to go about our day and never stop to realize that there are people around us who are lost. As believers, we can allow the Holy Spirit to awaken us to the needs of others. In order to receive a God-given burden, we must "wake up" to the things God cares about. He cares about people, just as he cared about those who were suffering in Jerusalem. One of the reasons God used Nehemiah was because he was "wide awake" to the problems that other people were going through. Are you wide awake today?

DAY 2

TITLE: *People Are the Burden!*

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:3

"And they said to me, '**The remnant** there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

OBSERVATION

There is nothing more dear to the heart of God than people. Nehemiah did not get a burden to build walls; he got a burden for "the remnant." The remnant was the group of Jewish people who lived in Jerusalem and were in great trouble because of the broken down walls. To Nehemiah, people were the burden.

As believers, we can care about a lot of things, but people matter the most. As we look to God for a burden, we must always realize that the burden will be rooted in a love for people. As you look around our city, our number one concern must be lost people. When we understand that our burden is for people, everything becomes really clear.

Why do we give, love and serve? Because people matter to God and they matter to us. We have thousands of reasons, and those reasons are people. God is calling us to stretch as a church in generosity so we can reach more people. It is only when a burden for people has entered our hearts that we are able to sacrifice to see souls saved and lives changed. Nehemiah understood that whatever God was calling him to was because of a love for people. People are the burden!

APPLICATION

Take time to write down the names of four people: two people you know and two people that you encounter at work or around town (and ask them their names) who will be impacted by the Rise Up faith journey. Take time

DAY 3

TITLE: *More than interested... I am concerned!*

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:1-2

"The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And ***I asked them concerning*** the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.

OBSERVATION

Many times we hear stories of incredible injustice in the world. We show interest in the story, and it even makes us think, "I wish the world was not like this." But rarely do we move from interest to concern. Concern is defined as having a specific connection with or responsibility for. When we become deeply concerned about something, we begin to take personal responsibility for it. God is looking for people who are not just interested, but are willing to be concerned and take ownership of the problem. You can't do everything, but you can do something.

Nehemiah became concerned about the Jews who escaped and survived the exile. That concern turned into a burden and that burden led him to action. As believers, we can not only be interested in making a difference in our city, we must become concerned. A deep concern for people who are far away from God will move our hearts to action. It will cause us to ask the right questions, and the right questions will cause us to provide answers. As believers, our concern for people should lead us to love and generosity. Today become more than interested, become concerned for those who are far away from God.

APPLICATION

What is keeping you from taking responsibility for your family, your church and the lost? Take time to evaluate your life and determine, "Am I

DAY 4

TITLE: *Speak, my heart is listening!*

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:2b

"And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And *they said to me*, 'The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.'"

OBSERVATION

As we learn to be aware of the problems around us and develop a burden for people, we will begin to hear God speak to us. Many times by simply opening up our hearts and telling Jesus we are listening, we will find direction. Nehemiah began to ask questions about the condition of the people. His questions opened the door for God to speak to him. The interesting thing is, the voice of God came to him through the people around him.

Often times we wait for God to speak to us, but maybe He is already speaking. In this passage of scripture, we see that God speaks to Nehemiah through the people who are in need. Many times we do not need to hear the audible voice of God to know what to do. Nehemiah hears the report from his brethren and is able to understand that God is speaking to him. The world around us cries out for help. As believers, we need to hear the voice of God in their cries. We don't need to pray about winning the lost; we just have to have an open heart to listen to the need. Our prayer must be, "Speak, my heart is listening."

APPLICATION

What is God speaking to you as you look at the world around you? The question isn't: "Is God calling you to do something?" It is: "Are you willing to take the time and open your heart to listen and hear God's call?" Take

DAY 5

TITLE: *Break my heart for what breaks yours!*

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:4a

"As soon as I heard these words I sat down and *wept and mourned* for days."

OBSERVATION

There are lots of things that we would like to see changed in the world. There are many good causes worth our time and attention. At the end of the day, the thing that matters most is what God holds dear to His heart. As believers, there is no greater sign of surrender than asking God to break our hearts for what breaks His.

In this passage of scripture, Nehemiah is able to feel the heart of God as he hears the bad report about Jerusalem. He sits down and begins to weep and mourn for days. His heart is broken for the thing God cares about most - people. Nehemiah now makes this problem very personal. He has officially received a burden from God for the people of Jerusalem. We need to ask ourselves, "Is my heart broken for the lost and the hurting? Does it move me in the deepest parts of my soul?" A burden will make you cry, but it will also fill your heart with passion. God is looking for people who will carry His heart and His passion for people.

APPLICATION

When is the last time your desire to reach people made your heart break? If you have never experienced this before, take time to reflect on how it felt when you knew you were far from God. That feeling is how thousands of people feel today. This is what breaks God's heart. Let God break your heart today for those who have never known the peace and power of life in Christ.

DAY 6

TITLE: Divine Interruptions

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:4a

As soon as I heard these words I *sat down* and wept and mourned for days.

OBSERVATION

In today's modern age, people are busier than ever before. We have jobs that are demanding, phones that are distracting, not to mention our families, friends and, if we are lucky, a hobby. It is hard with so much on our plate to find room for one more thing. Nehemiah was probably no different. He was a very influential man who had many important things to do. But when he hears the bad report about Jerusalem, something very interesting happens; he sits down.

Often times we are so busy that we can't find the time to just sit down and hear from God. Part of the journey of faith is being able to get alone with God and pray. Nehemiah sat down and wept and mourned. He poured his heart out to God. If we are going to make a difference as a church, we must allow our burden to drive us to prayer. That means we will need to clear out the distractions and sit down. Many times our lives are so busy that there is no place for a divine interruption. We have schedules and plans, but maybe God wants to interrupt those plans. God rarely does something great without interrupting someone's life.

Can God interrupt your life and your lifestyle? Are you able to sit down and make some room for Him to work in your life?

APPLICATION

Set some extra time aside today for God to speak to you. Spend some time opening your heart to the Holy Spirit. God will begin to lead you as you consider your role in this Rise Up faith journey. He wants to give you a

DAY 7

TITLE: The Language of a Burden

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:4

"As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and *praying* before the God of heaven."

OBSERVATION

Have you touched your hand to a hot stove? You can't help but respond to that kind of pain and shock. Most people will scream or cry. There is a response to our experience. With God, it is no different. When you begin to experience the heart of God for people, there will be a response. Let's look at how Nehemiah responds in the text.

As Nehemiah gets a God-given burden, that burden drives him to prayer. Nehemiah's passion to make a difference first led him to prayer before action. The Bible tells us that he continued in fasting and prayer. If we desire for God to lead us, we must engage in the act of prayer. Prayer is the engine room of faith, and faith is what moves heaven and earth. Nehemiah understood if he was going to do something great, he must first pray. As a church, God calls us to great things. He has given us a burden to reach our city for Christ. That burden must lead us to pray, just as it did Nehemiah. Praying through this journey is how we should respond as a church.

APPLICATION

Take time to pray. It is in prayer that God stretches our faith and prepares us to be used for great things. Take time today to begin to prayerfully consider your commitment to see souls saved and lives changed.

PRAYER

Jesus, I want to be part of something great for your kingdom. Today I choose to seek you and to be open to your leadership in my life. Give me faith to believe for great things as you move in me and through me.

DAY 8

TITLE: When Burden And Passion Collide!

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:4

As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued *fasting and praying* before the God of heaven.

OBSERVATION

Have you ever been desperate to find the answer to a problem? Most people have been there a time or two. Maybe it was a job transition that you needed God to speak to you about. Whatever the situation, you had a burden that you needed an answer from God about. This is the place where Nehemiah found himself. He needed God to do for him what he could not do for himself. When his passion and his burden collided, it led him to not only pray but to fast.

There is something powerful about fasting that can bring clarity and favor to a situation. Fasting is simply giving up something to gain more of God. It may be food, television or social media. Whatever it is, the idea is to clear out things that have your attention and refocus on God. Maybe God will lead you in this time to sacrifice some personal comfort to hear from Him. As believers, many times we must give up something to go up in God. Nehemiah understood this. He was going to put all his passion into hearing from God, so he could make a real difference in peoples' lives.

APPLICATION

Consider giving up something in order to spend more time with God to hear from Him. Maybe you could watch less television to spend time praying. Write down your fasting commitment next to the four names you started to pray over on Day 2. Over the next week take time to sacrifice your regular routine to hear from God about your role in the Rise Up faith journey.

DAY 9

TITLE: Pray His Promises!

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:5-6

"And I said, 'O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned.'"

OBSERVATION

When we pray, we must pray with faith. But, what do we use to build our faith? In this passage of scripture, Nehemiah prays to God as a covenant to keep on loving God. There is nothing that will build your faith like praying the promises of God. When we understand that God will always keep His promises, it gives us confidence when we ask Him to use us to do great things. Nehemiah reminds himself that they are God's people and that God will restore them if they return to Him.

Nehemiah then begins to repent of anything that is against the promises of God. Nehemiah is saying, "God, I know you can do anything. Please forgive me for not believing you and being committed to your promises." We must do the same.

APPLICATION

What is holding you back from believing God can do great things through you and your local church? Is it a lack of faith or of trust, or is it an unwillingness to follow His commands? Take time to examine your heart, and remind yourself of the promises of God. Ask forgiveness for whatever in your heart stands in the way of you serving God in the world. Realign your life with the promises of God and pray for understanding today.

DAY 10

TITLE: Prayer of Action

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:10-11

"They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

OBSERVATION

Sometimes in life we don't know what to do, and that feeling is paralyzing. But there are times that we know what to do, and we just need to get started. Notice in this passage of scripture that Nehemiah never prays, "Should I do something?" He simply prays that God would give him success and mercy. This is what a prayer of action looks like.

We don't need to pray about some things, because God has already spoken to us about it. We don't need to pray about winning the lost, being generous or moving in faith. These things God has already asked us to have a burden for. We need to take Nehemiah's example and pray for success and mercy as we move forward. As a church, we don't need to pray about moving forward and stretching in faith. We have to Rise Up to do that. What we need to pray about what our role is and ask God to give us success. This is what Nehemiah did, and we should follow his example by offering up a prayer of action today.

APPLICATION

Have you ever prayed about doing something you know you should just do? What is holding you back? Is it fear, doubt or insecurity? Take time today to identify what is holding you back from moving forward. Lay aside your doubt and fear, and ask God to give you success as you step out in faith. He is with you!

DAY 11

TITLE: What Is Faith?

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 1:10-11

"They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Hebrews 11:1

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

OBSERVATION

Have you ever wished something great would happen to you? Many of us have. But, wishing and faith are very different. Faith is an assurance or a confidence that the things you hope for in Christ will happen. Faith is the activating ingredient to the promises of God. When we hear the promises of God and believe them, we see faith rise in our hearts. This gives us the courage to overcome our doubts and fears.

Nehemiah had faith that God was going to give him favor with the king. So much so that he was bold enough to make a crazy request of the king. Faith gives you confidence. If God is going to do something great through you, it will require faith - faith that what you see in your heart will come to pass. The Bible tells us that it is impossible to please God without faith; therefore, we can assume God will never call us to something that does not require faith. As you look at what God is calling you to during this Rise Up faith journey, ask yourself, "Does this require faith?" If it does, then you are on the right track to seeing God do something great in your life. If you can do it alone, you need to dream bigger and let God place faith in your heart. He wants to move through you and give you a great

DAY 12

TITLE: Our Faith Journey

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:5-6

"And I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.' Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), 'How long will your journey be? And when will you return?' So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time."

OBSERVATION

The king may not have understood Nehemiah's faith, but he did understand one thing. Life is a journey, and so is faith. While there can be moments of great faith, faith does not grow in a moment. Faith grows during the journey that God calls you to. Each day and each moment presents itself as an opportunity to exercise your faith. Faith is like a muscle; it must be used, stretched and challenged in order to grow stronger. That is what the Rise Up faith journey is about.

We want your faith to grow stronger daily on this journey. Just as Nehemiah was going to experience many obstacles and challenges along the way, so will you. There will be moments that you don't want to engage the journey. Stay the course, just as Nehemiah did, and watch your faith grow stronger and stronger. We are on a faith journey together, and this journey is going to stretch and grow us more than we can imagine.

APPLICATION

Do you see faith as a journey? There will be moments in the journey that make you want to quit or change direction. Determine in your heart today that you are going to commit to this faith journey. When you doubt or feel discouraged, take time to reflect and realize that God is strengthening and stretching your faith. Ask someone you know to be a partner with you in prayer as you face the challenge of doubt or discouragement. Write their

DAY 13

TITLE: Desire It

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:2

"And the king said to me, 'Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.'"

OBSERVATION

Our desires play an important role in the development of our faith. It is almost impossible to really believe God for something great that you don't passionately desire to happen. Have you ever met a man who built a great business, but had no desire whatsoever to build it? The answer to that is probably, "No." Why? Because people have faith for the things that light up their hearts with desire.

Nehemiah was no different. He had such a strong desire to help the people in Jerusalem that he could not hide it. It was all over his face, and everyone could see it. If we are ever going to be used by God to do something great, it has to become our greatest desire - a desire that is all over our face and is carried in our hearts. If we as people don't desire to stretch in generosity, then we probably never will. It is very hard to ask God for a miracle in your finances, work or family that you don't desire with all of your heart. The book of Psalms 37:4 says:

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."

As we delight ourselves in God and His work, we will find the desires of our heart align with His. This is the starting point of faith: a strong desire to serve God with all your heart.

APPLICATION

Do you desire to make a difference? Do you desire to be generous? If you

DAY 14

TITLE: Decide It

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:2-3

And the king said to me, 'Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.' Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, 'Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?'"

OBSERVATION

If desire is the birthing place of faith, then decision is the next step. In this passage of scripture, Nehemiah is confronted with a decision-making moment. The king asks him why he is sad, and Nehemiah is terrified. In those days it was completely unacceptable to be downcast in the presence of the king. In this moment Nehemiah has to make a decision whether he will pull back or move forward. Nehemiah "decides" to move forward in faith by telling the king about his vision.

Each one of us will come to a similar situation in our own faith journey. It is one thing to have a strong desire for something in prayer, and it is another to decide to do it. God wants us to have the courage to commit to what He has placed in our hearts. There will be moments when it is easier to turn back and change course, but at this point of decision, great faith is built. Remember this: "The determined decision of a person burns with desire." Let the strong desire God has placed in your heart outweigh the fear and doubt. Make a strong decision today.

APPLICATION

Have you decided to commit to what God has placed in your heart to do? Take time today to evaluate this question: "Am I letting fear drive me or am I allowing the desire God has placed in my heart to guide me?" Take time to pray about your decision and commitment to serve God through the

DAY 15

TITLE: Ask It

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:3-5

"I said to the king, 'Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?' Then the king said to me, 'What are you requesting?' So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.'"

OBSERVATION

After you have decided it, you can now move to "asking it." It is important you understand that decision comes before asking. The book of James, chapter one, tells us this:

"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

God calls us to make up our minds and decide before we start asking. Nehemiah followed this model. He decided to speak up about the desires in his heart, and the king's response is, "What are you requesting?" I believe that this is how God responds to us also. When we make up our minds that we want to make a difference, then God begins to ask us, "How can I help?" God wants to help us see the miraculous happen during this Rise Up faith journey, but we must have a made-up mind and ask God to provide and show favor to us as we step out in faith. Ask great things of God, because you have made up your mind to step out in faith and make a difference.

DAY 16

TITLE: Receive It

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:7-8

"And I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.' And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me."

OBSERVATION

After asking comes receiving. The receiving of faith is very different than experiencing the outcome of faith. We receive the answer in our spirits long before we see the results. Jesus put it best:

"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." - Mark 11:24

Notice that we receive it and then it becomes ours. In the scripture in Nehemiah, he receives the answer from the king, but it was some time before he saw the results of the king's answer. Nehemiah received a letter, but there was a lot of work and effort between receiving the letter and experiencing the power that the letter brought. This is the way faith operates. We receive the answer or the confident assurance of things hoped for. Then as we move forward we begin to see what we received in our spirit become a reality in our lives.

God wants to give you the gift of faith during this Rise Up faith journey. He wants you to receive your commitment by faith and then move forward and work through you. God wants you to have a "letter" from Him that carries authority and provision to see the vision happen. Today receive by

faith what God wants to do through you.

APPLICATION

Prayer is the key to receiving from God. As you look at your commitment to the Rise Up faith journey, pray until you receive faith for it. Pray until you know that God is going to come through on your behalf. This does not mean you will not doubt sometimes, but your faith will be stronger than doubt because it carries authority.

PRAYER

Jesus, today help me receive from you. Give me the faith and confidence that I need during this faith journey. I want to believe with great confidence that you are able to provide a miracle in my life.

NOTES

DAY 17

TITLE: Speak It

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:17

"But now I said to them, 'You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!'"

OBSERVATION

Have you ever wanted to share a dream, but were afraid that people would think you were crazy? Many of us feel that way. We feel like God is asking us to do something great, but we are afraid to talk about it. There is something intimidating when talking about what God is asking you to do by faith. When you speak it out, it begins to become real to you. It is one thing to think it, and it is another to speak it out.

Nehemiah must have felt the same way. He has received all that he needs to get the job done, but now it is time to start speaking it out and telling the people the plan. This must have been a scary time for Nehemiah. Thoughts of self-doubt must have been swarming through his head, but he chose to speak out the dream. At some point in this faith journey, you will need to do the same. There will come a time when you need to speak out what God is telling you in prayer and with the right group of people. That group may be your family or people in your Community Group. Make sure you share with people who will build up your faith, not tear it down. Speak out the dreams God has given you; declare them today. You never know how much your words could encourage someone else in their faith journey.

APPLICATION

Speak out loud in prayer the things God has placed in your heart. Find someone in church to talk to about what God has put on your heart about serving God and committing to the Rise Up faith journey. Seek and give

DAY 18

TITLE: See It

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:13

"And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire."

Nehemiah 2:17

"Then I said to them, 'You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies in waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.'"

OBSERVATION

Helen Keller said, "The only thing worse than being blind is to have sight and no vision." Faith gives us the ability to visualize the thing God has put on our hearts actually happening. Faith is seeing what cannot be seen without faith. Nehemiah understood this principle. He has a clear knowledge of the current state of the walls, but he also saw something else. He could see what they would be like at completion. Faith perceives as reality those things that are not revealed to the natural senses. His response to what he saw in his spirit was to arise and build the walls.

Faith is not passive. It will require work on your behalf. The Bible tells us that faith without works is dead. The thing you see and believe God for is going to require effort on your part. It may require a change in lifestyle and sacrifice. God does not always grant us vision to see the end result completely, but provides "a lamp unto our feet." Can you see yourself getting a promotion or starting a new business? Can you see yourself being able to meet your commitment to the Rise Up faith journey? As you begin to see things through God's eyes, it will build your faith and give you the energy to move forward. Get a vision of God doing through you what you believe for. If you can see it, it can become a reality in your life.

DAY 19

TITLE: Act It

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 3:1

"Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, and consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel."

OBSERVATION

At some point in this faith journey, the only thing left is to act on what you believe. This is where our dreams become a reality. It has been said, "If you do what you can do, God will do what only He can do." There are always things we have no control over, but most of the time there are a lot of things we can do.

Nehemiah and the Jewish people could not know if they would be successful or not, but they could get to work. They began to act on the vision God gave them. They began to rebuild the walls, piece by piece. As each family did their part, God began to do His. He gave them great success and favor. At some point in this Rise Up faith journey, you have to act on what God asks you to do. You will need to plan and make sacrifices to see the vision come to pass. Faith is not simply trusting God to do everything. It is a partnership between you and God to see the vision come to pass. Today, begin to put action to the plans God has placed in your heart.

APPLICATION

What are things that you can begin to do to see the vision come to pass? Begin to write a plan of action to see the vision move forward. Think about the things in your life that need to change, and begin to get to work on them. Put forth the effort, and watch what God will begin to do. If you haven't started already, now would be a good time to begin working

DAY 20

TITLE: Tested Faith

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:20

"Then I replied to them, 'The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.'"

OBSERVATION

Today as we look back on the last ten days of growing our faith, let us remember a few things. Faith is a journey that God wants to grow you in. Your faith will be tested along the journey. Remember this: "A faith that has not been tested cannot be trusted". There will be moments that your faith will waver. Put into practice the things you have learned. Remember to stir up your desire for the vision. Make up your mind, and ask bold requests of God. Receive it, speak it, see it and act upon the faith God has placed in your heart.

Nehemiah's faith was tested, but his response was to know that God was with him. He spoke out boldly that God was going to prosper him. This needs to be your attitude throughout this faith journey. Remember that God is with you, and He will do what He said He would do. Stir up your faith and lean into this Rise Up faith journey.

APPLICATION

Take time to reflect on all God has been saying to you. Write down the things the Holy Spirit has spoken to you. When you go through a time of testing, go back to these promises and remind yourself that God is with you. Keep the vision in front of you, and build up your faith daily by remembering what God has told you.

PRAYER

Jesus, today I ask you to keep my faith strong throughout this journey. Help

me to remember what you have spoken to me. May I never feel alone, and may I be aware that you are near to me in this process.

NOTES

DAY 21

TITLE: Sacrifice

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 4:6

"So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work."

OBSERVATION

Sometimes the beginning of a journey is the easiest part. Many times, as believers, we start well, but don't end well. The thing that lies between the starting line and the finishing line is a lot of sacrifice. It has been said that you have to give up to go up. The Kingdom of God is no different. If we want to move forward and complete the task God has given us, it is going to require sacrifice.

Nehemiah understood this principle. In this passage they are halfway finished, because the people had a mind to work. You could also put it like this: The people had a willingness to sacrifice. What God is calling us to do, individually and as a church, will require sacrifice. It will not be an easy process, but the reward on the other side is worth it. When we give something up to see God do something, we make room for other people to experience the life of Christ. During this Rise Up faith journey, God calls us to not only give up what is comfortable, but to give sacrificially. If we all open our hearts and let God lead, we can truly do more than we ever thought was possible. We have to give up to go up!

APPLICATION

Have you been processing this Rise Up faith journey through the lens of sacrifice? Many times our first response is to give God what we have left over, but real maturity understands that everything we have is God's and we need to have an open hand if He asks us to give it back. Begin to process this journey through sacrificial eyes.

DAY 22

TITLE: Change in Lifestyle

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 2:5

"And I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.'"

OBSERVATION

Nehemiah was in a pretty good situation when this story began. He was the king's cupbearer, which was a pretty honorable profession. Nehemiah probably never experienced lack in the king's palace. It was probably one of the most comfortable situations he could have been in. The interesting thing is Nehemiah refused to live in comfort while others experienced hardship. He asked the king to leave his position to go to a rough place and work on a near impossible task. This is what sacrifice looks like.

As followers of Jesus, we have to be open to God calling us to change our lifestyles in order to serve him and his people. Nehemiah left his comfortable position to make a difference. During this Rise Up faith journey, God will call us to do the same - to make sacrifices in our lifestyle so we can be generous people. What would happen if you changed your lifestyle a little to free yourself up financially to make a difference? We believe that the church will grow, and so will your faith in God. We never sacrifice anything without God moving in our lives. The simple fact is that a willingness to sacrifice is a picture of the cross in our lives. Jesus left heaven to save us, and our response should be the same.

APPLICATION

Are you open to God asking you to change your lifestyle so that you can become more generous? Write your feelings down. This can be a hard process, but it needs to be an honest one. Open up your heart to God and process sacrifice together. Use the Commitment Guide section to explore

DAY 23

TITLE: Living Uncomfortable

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 4:9

"And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night."

OBSERVATION

Many people's goal in life is to just be happy. But the problem is that happiness depends on what is happening to you. If things go right, we celebrate and rejoice; if things go wrong, we become depressed. God does not want you to be happy; He wants you to have joy. Joy is not determined by what happens to you, but it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that comes out of you. Despite our situations, we are able to really LIVE in an uncomfortable situation.

In Nehemiah chapter four, the situation is so uncomfortable that they had to set guards to protect themselves day and night. This wasn't easy, but they chose to live uncomfortably, because the sacrifice was worth it. God will often times ask us to live sacrificially for a season to see great things happen. Even though life is not as comfortable as it was before, there will come an overwhelming sense of joy from God because you know that He is with you. In the midst of it all, God will work in you and through you like never before. Being a little uncomfortable is sometimes the best way to live.

APPLICATION

Some of the sacrifices God will ask you to make may make things feel a little less comfortable. Ask God to fill your heart with joy everyday. The Bible tells us that the Joy of the Lord is our strength. Allow God's joy to strengthen you as you walk through this sacrificial faith journey.

DAY 24

TITLE: Sacrifices of Many

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 4:13

"So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows."

OBSERVATION

We all want to do something great with our lives. The thing we oftentimes miss is one simple fact: Great things aren't done by the gifts of a few, but by the sacrifices of many. Nehemiah had everyone involved in rebuilding the walls. Men, women and children all did their part. He divided them up by clans and families. Each person sacrificed something to see the project move forward.

Throughout the Rise Up faith journey, you will hear this statement: "It is not equal giving; it is equal sacrifice." Not all of us can give the same amount, but we can all show the same sacrificial spirit. Sometime we might feel like our contribution does not make a difference. We feel like our contribution is so small it won't really impact the big picture. But, as we move forward together, with everyone sacrificing, our generosity together makes a huge impact. Nehemiah was able to complete the rebuilding of the walls in 52 days. He did not do that by himself; he did it with the sacrifices of everyone involved. We all can make a difference, because we all can make a sacrifice.

APPLICATION

Have you ever felt like your gift would not make that big of a difference? Begin to process your commitment, not by the size of the gift, but by the level of your sacrifice. Pray that everyone who calls our church their home will make a sacrificial commitment to Rise Up. We will make a great impact when we move forward in unity.

DAY 25

TITLE: Sacrifice For Others

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 4:14

"And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, 'Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.'"

OBSERVATION

In life you can do a lot of things for yourself, but the most meaningful things done in life are for others. When you think about the word sacrifice, it immediately brings to mind other people. Sure, you could sacrifice to make your own life better, but how much more would you sacrifice if you saw a difference made in other people? Sacrifice is most powerful and most rewarding when it is done for the benefit of others.

Nehemiah, as a leader, believed the same thing. He told the people why they were fighting and sacrificing. It was for their brothers, sons, daughters, wives and the other people around them. The sacrifice they made was to make everyone's life better, including their own. When we take our eyes off of ourselves and sacrifice for others, our lives get better too. Jesus modeled this servant leader attitude on the cross for us. He did not come to earth for us to sacrifice for Him; He came that he might sacrifice for us. Remember today why you make sacrifices. It is for the people we are yet to reach. We have Rise Up to sacrifice - so other people can meet Jesus.

APPLICATION

Today, remind yourself whom you are sacrificing for - the next generation and for those who need to meet Jesus. Take time today to pray for the people who have yet to know Christ. Take time to return to the place you went on Day 1, and pray with the vision and faith you have gained since

then. Notice how your prayers have changed. Ask Jesus to remind you again what this faith journey is all about. It is about people.

PRAYER

Jesus, today I thank you for allowing me to be a part of a church that has faith that reaches beyond its walls, and believes in the next generation. Thank you that we sacrifice to reach more people and to make a difference through serving others around the world. Please help me to always remember why I sacrifice. Help my love for people to continue to grow. I love you, Lord.

NOTES

DAY 26

TITLE: Commitment

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 4:7

"But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it."

OBSERVATION

No victory God brings about will go unchallenged by hell. We are going to experience real opposition as we move in faith. When the enemy realizes we are serious about moving forward, we will begin to experience opposition.

This was the story for Nehemiah. The Bible says when Sanballat and Tobiah heard that the wall was "moving forward," they began to try and bring confusion. It will be no different with us as believers. This is where commitment comes in and where it will be tested. In fact, you can't really know if you are committed until there is opposition in your life. During this faith journey, we can expect some opposition. When it comes, begin to confess, "I am committed and will not be confused." If we can keep our hearts focused in the right direction and not allow confusion to enter in, we will experience great victory. God wants to help you overcome anything that comes against you, and He will often work through your commitment. Let God help you stay committed to the journey.

APPLICATION

As we approach commitment weekend, we need to understand there will be resistance. Don't allow confusion to set in or fear begin to lead you. The Bible says God has not given you a spirit of fear, but one of love, power and a sound mind. Walk in a sound mind today, letting the theme of your heart

be commitment.

PRAYER

God, I want to be a committed person. Please help me to recognize the enemy's tactics and to be led by your spirit. I am committed to this faith journey you have me on. I love you, Jesus.

NOTES

DAY 27

TITLE: Resistance

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 4:10

"In Judah it was said, 'The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.' And our enemies said, 'They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.'"

OBSERVATION

Opposition will test our commitment, but there are several different kinds of resistance we will find in our lives. Resistance will challenge our commitment to the vision and can often times lead to discouragement. God wants us to understand that we do not need to be afraid; we just need to stay committed.

Nehemiah and the Jewish people experienced resistance in two ways in this passage of scripture. The first was resistance from within. They began to say to each other that the task was too great and the work too much for them to complete. The first thing we must do is defeat discouragement inside of ourselves. There will be moments along this journey where the task seems too great and the cost too much. Know that God is with you and He will give you victory if you stay committed.

The second is resistance from the outside. Many times this can come from people who simply have nothing encouraging to say. Often, when you begin to make sacrifices for God, the people around you will not understand. They will ask why you are so committed to this. Don't allow outside voices to discourage your faith and the things God is doing in you and through you. Tell yourself, as Nehemiah told the people, "Do not be afraid and remember the Lord." He will strengthen your commitment today.

DAY 28

TITLE: Unity

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 6:2

"Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, 'Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.' But they intended to do me harm. And I sent messengers to them, saying, 'I am doing a great work and I can not come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?'"

OBSERVATION

One of the most powerful forces on the planet is a group of people with a unified commitment. Unity is one of the most powerful things a church can have. Jesus understood this and prayed that the church would walk in unity. The enemy understands that if he can break apart the unity of the church, he can kill its strength. This is what happened to Nehemiah. The enemy tried to get among the people and create problems so that they would have to stop rebuilding the walls. The great thing is, Nehemiah does not give his enemy any room to slow him down. He tells them that the work he is doing is too great to get distracted by them. He refused to stop and entertain the negative voices around him. This is a great reminder to us today.

As a church, we need to be committed and move forward together. The work we are doing is too great to allow anything to distract us or to cause us to stop working. Each person must guard and protect the unity of the church. We cannot allow anything to come between us or to give the enemy a foothold in us. Our desire as a church is to move forward together in unity - that we keep the Rise Up vision in front of us and refuse to allow anything to distract us.

APPLICATION

Spend time praying for the unity of the church. Pray for those in the church

DAY 29

TITLE: Staying Committed

SCRIPTURE: Read: Nehemiah 4:1-3; Nehemiah 4:7-8; Nehemiah 4:11-12

OBSERVATION

The commitment of Nehemiah and the people was challenged in many ways. They experienced ridicule (4:1-3); resistance (4:7-8); and rumors (4:11-12). Nehemiah was able to lead the people and stay committed by responding to these challenges correctly.

- He relied on God
- He reinforced his weak points
- He found encouragement and encouraged others
- He refused to quit
- He kept the people unified

If we are going to stay committed as a church, we must all do the same thing. We need to rely on God. We must never forget that God is our source and He is leading us. We must encourage each other in our Community Groups and fight to keep the unity. This is how we stay committed to the journey. We are committed to growing in our heart for God, heart for each other and heart for our world. If we are able to keep these three priorities in our lives, we will experience something great during this Rise Up faith journey.

APPLICATION

Look over the things Nehemiah did to build commitment. Which one of these things do you need to strengthen your commitment? Remember that Nehemiah trusted God and persevered, without ever seeing the example of Jesus Christ on the cross. Give thanks for the example of Jesus, his sacrifice on the cross, and showing us the glory that is found beyond the

DAY 30

TITLE: Moving Forward

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 6:15-16

"So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God."

OBSERVATION

What we commit to God, He will turn into a miracle. That is how everyone around Nehemiah viewed the situation, even his enemies. They saw the power of a person fully committed to the work of God. Nehemiah's commitment became a testimony of God's goodness to everyone around him. This is what God wants to do at our church.

As we come to this final day of the 30-day devotional, understand that your commitment matters. You are leaving a legacy for your children, family and those we are trying to win to Jesus. No commitment is too small or insignificant. We are the body of Christ in the world, and the work of every part of that body matters. What matters is that you have opened your heart to God and allowed Him to work through you.

Commitment weekend is just the beginning. We are on a three-year journey of prayer, sacrifice and commitment. Stay the course and believe God for miracles. At the end of this journey, we will look back and say, "Look at what God has done." The exciting part is that each of our stories are a part of the bigger story God is telling through our church. To see people come as they are and be forever changed by the love of Jesus is our mission. Thank you for your commitment to the Rise Up faith journey. The best is yet to come!



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