

How to Tackle a Tough Job

Nehemiah 2

Rev. Brian Bill

October 13-14, 2018

Grow Time Video

If you didn't get a *Grow Time* booklet when you came in, stop by the table in the lobby. You might also want to grab a free t-shirt while supplies last.

We want to make sure you're aware of some key dates coming up.

- **November 4** – We will have an all-church prayer and praise service at 4 pm.
- **November 10/11** – Commitment Weekend. Everyone will be encouraged to turn in their commitment cards.
- **December 1/2** – Celebration Weekend. We'll bring our first offerings for Grow Time. 10% of what's given will go to three different Go Team partners – one in our community, one in our country and one on the continents. This will likely be the largest single offering in the history of our church.

Speaking of celebrating, we rejoice that Pastor Andrew Brunson, an evangelical pastor from Pennsylvania, has been freed from imprisonment in Turkey!

Let's pray.

I recently came across some actual resumes that stated these accomplishments:

Received a plaque for Salesperson of the Year

I'm a perfectionist and rarely if ever forget details.

References: None. I've left a path of destruction behind me.

Nehemiah had a pretty impressive resume and instead of leaving a path of destruction behind him, he was about to tackle the path of destruction in front of him. His resume would include the following accomplishments: "*Cupbearer to the king for many years. Great job stability as long as no one tried to poison the boss.*" Under the section of his resume where he listed personal information, you'd likely read this:

- *I'm concerned about problems*

- *I have a strong conviction about God’s character*
- *I confess my sins on a regular basis*
- *I have confidence in God’s promises*
- *I have a commitment to get involved*

This is a summary of what we learned last weekend from Nehemiah 1.

Nehemiah did not rely on his resume but instead got out his tools so he could handle the tasks ahead of him. In verses 1-10, we’ll see that he had at least **5 tools** in his toolbox and in verses 11-20 we’ll look at the **5 tasks** that he tackled.

Tools in Nehemiah’s Toolbox

I don’t have a lot of tools because I’m not very handy, though I did change our furnace filter this week! I would rather buy a book than a belt sander any day. This is a problem for me when I need to fix something or tackle a project. Fortunately, my dad has an entire hardware store in his garage and whenever he comes down to visit, he loads up his truck with tools. He came recently to help me do some work – actually; I just handed him the tools and made sure he had plenty of black licorice!

Nehemiah had a lot of tools as well. He pulled them out, one by one, just when he needed them.

1. Waiting. The first tool Nehemiah used was the tool called *waiting* in verse 1. He was a man of decisive action, and when he prayed it was natural for him to ask God to provide an early, if not immediate, opportunity to speak to the king. Remember the closing verse in chapter one indicates that Nehemiah wanted success **“today”** in the presence of the king.

In Nehemiah 2:1, we learn that it is **“the month of Nissan,”** which is four months later. Compared to other believers in the Bible, waiting four months is a pretty short time. Abraham waited over 25 years for Isaac, Israel was enslaved for 400 years in Egypt and then spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. Nehemiah waited patiently on the Lord for an answer, just as we’re urged to do in Hebrews 6:12: **“So that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and *patience* inherit the promises.”** Nehemiah could weep and pray *and* he could also wait and pray.

Are you in God's waiting room right now? Lysa TerKeurst writes: *"You may be living under a promise of God but do not yet see the fruit of that promise. You might be praying for something that hasn't happened yet and even see no hope of it ever coming to pass. Though we may not understand, we must trust God's timing is perfect. Our God is a God of completion. He makes promises and then He fulfills them. Even if we don't see it in this life – He will complete what He has set out to complete."*

Edgewood, waiting time is not wasted time. Quiet reflection may have provided Nehemiah with fresh insight about how to approach the king. God wants each of us to get real familiar with this tool because we're going to have to use it a lot.

2. Trusting. Verses 2-3 tell us the second tool he fished out of his toolbox was called *trusting*. Nehemiah was **"sad"** in the last part of verse 1 and is used three other times to describe how he looked when he was in the presence of the king. Artaxerxes could have interpreted his sadness as dissatisfaction with the king. Interestingly, this word can also be translated as *"bad or evil,"* meaning the king could have thought Nehemiah was being nefarious.

More likely the king wondered if Nehemiah was discouraged so he asked him a question to find out why Nehemiah was not his chipper self. Nehemiah became anxious when Artaxerxes asked him this because he knew the king only wanted happy people around him. In verse 2, Nehemiah says, ***"Then, I was very much afraid"*** which can literally be translated, *"a terrible fear came over me."*

He was very much afraid for at least two reasons. First, he knew he was expected to be perfectly content just to be in the presence of the king. Subjects who were sad or melancholy around the king were usually executed for "raining on his parade." Everyone was expected to reflect the sunlight of the king's majesty.

Second, he was about to ask the monarch of the Persian Empire to reverse a written policy Artaxerxes had made several years earlier halting Jerusalem's reconstruction as recorded in Ezra 4:21: ***"Therefore make a decree that these men be made to cease, and that this city be not rebuilt, until a decree is made by me."*** Nehemiah knew it would take the power of God to get Artaxerxes to change his mind. I think I'd be afraid too.

What are you afraid of today? Are you worried that something you did in the past will catch up to you? Perhaps you're afraid of the present and find yourself

crippled by the fear of people or problems. Maybe you're fearful about the future or even death.

Fortunately, Nehemiah's faith was greater than his fear. He did the right thing because he believed the promises of God. Notice what happened, ***"I said to the king..."*** Instead of paralyzing him, fear propelled Nehemiah to action. Months of prayer had prepared him for these crucial minutes.

Then, using wisdom, he affirms his boss by saying, ***"Let the king live forever!"*** Far from wishing the king ill, he wanted the king to live a long time. Daniel exhibited this same kind of deference in Daniel 6:21: ***"O king, live forever!"***

He explains why he was sad in verse 3: ***"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?"*** Did you notice that Nehemiah never mentions the name of the city? Jerusalem's history of independence might have turned the king's thoughts toward questions of politics and national security. Instead of going political, he chose the personal route – that's usually the better choice. What Nehemiah did say was, ***"I want to honor the burial place of my fathers."*** This made a lot of sense to the King because the Persians honored their dead as well.

Nehemiah's fear could have led him to be timid. Instead he used the tool of trusting very effectively. In verse 4 Nehemiah pulls out another well-worn tool – the tool of *praying*.

3. Praying. Verse 4 begins with a direct question from the King: ***"What are you requesting?"*** This reminds me of the question the king asked Esther in Esther 5:3: ***"What is it, Esther? What is your request?"*** Before answering the King of Persia, Nehemiah needed to speak briefly with the King of Heaven: ***"So I prayed to the God of heaven."***

This had to be a short prayer because it happened between the time the king asked his question and Nehemiah's answer. He probably prayed something like, ***"Help me, Lord!"*** or ***"Give me wisdom."*** He obviously didn't have time to drop to his knees or even bow his head. If he had done that, the king would have suspected treason.

You and I can pray at any time, in any place by sending up "popcorn prayers" to God. Right before we have to give an answer to our boss, or before responding to our spouse, or when disciplining our kids, or when looking for a way to impact our

neighbors for Christ, just shoot up a prayer. It doesn't have to be long or even audible. Actually, this is the only way to fulfill 1 Thessalonians 5:17 where we're challenged to "*pray continually.*"

4. The next tool is **planning**. We see this in verses 5-8a. Nehemiah had lifted his heart to God; now he must open his mouth to the king. Notice how polite Nehemiah is: "*If it pleases the king*" and how humble he is: "*and if your servant has found favor...*" In verse 6 and verse 7 Nehemiah again uses the phrase, "*pleases the king.*"

We would do well to be polite and humble when speaking or posting because we live in an age of outrage. This is similar to what we read in 1 Peter 3:15 where we're told to speak to unbelievers "*with gentleness and respect.*"

Observe that Nehemiah practiced both dependent praying *and* deliberate planning. Some think all you have to do is pray; others focus almost exclusively on planning. It shouldn't be an "either/or" but a "both/and" deal. We are called to pray *and* plan; to worship *and* work; to make requests *and* to fill out requisitions.

Nehemiah was ready to answer the king's questions: "*...send me to Judah, to the city of my father's graves, that I may rebuild it.*" Nehemiah knew how to plan the dangerous journey by asking for letters on the king's stationery, which would give him safe passage through the different territories he came across. We see in verse 8 that he wanted permission to take some timber out of the king's own forest. He had done some research to know that the keeper of the king's lumberyard was named Asaph. This forest was also called "paradise" in Hebrew and looked like a park filled with orchards.

Nehemiah asked for, and received three things from the king: *permission*, *protection*, and *provisions*.

5. The final tool he pulled out in verses 8b-10 was the tool of **testifying**. He gave testimony to the goodness of God in answering his prayers, guiding his mind, directing his speech, and meeting his needs. Look at the last part of verse 8: "*And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.*" The phrase, "*good hand*" means, "*well-pleasing.*" Only God could have brought about such a dramatic change in the king's mind and the cupbearer's destiny. This is an illustration of Proverbs 21:1: "*The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.*"

Nehemiah knew what was taking place had everything to do with God's arranging, not human contriving. Psalm 118:23 says, "***This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.***" Ezra 7:9 is similar: "***For the good hand of the Lord was on him.***" Nehemiah was meticulous in his planning but it would not have been enough were it not for the Lord's perfect timing, constant guidance, and overruling provision.

As we move into our *Grow Time Initiative*, I am confident we will see the "good hand of God upon us." We must use the tools of *waiting, trusting, praying* and *planning*. And then, we'll see God do something truly amazing. When He does, we will *testify* about His gracious provision.

Verse 10 introduces some bad guys – we'll come back to them later. Suffice it to say that they cast a sinister shadow over the story: "***But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.***"

Tasks for Tackling a Tough Job

I admire my dad for many reasons but I'm always amazed at how he seems to know exactly how to tackle a job. He can look at a project and determine what needs to happen first. Sometimes he'll think about it for a while, and even lay awake figuring everything out – but he always knows the steps that need to be taken before the project can be completed.

Nehemiah was a master builder as well. As we move to the second half of chapter 2, we'll see that he *tackled five tasks*.

1. Nehemiah first **replenished his resources** in verse 11. As he looked at the city's shattered walls and useless gates, he was overwhelmed. But, before he could examine them more closely, there was a greater priority. Nehemiah needed a nap: "***So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days.***"

The journey of four months took its toll on Nehemiah – he was probably suffering from 'camel lag'! Ezra did the same thing upon arriving in Jerusalem many years earlier when he rested for three days (see Ezra 8:32). Just as Elijah needed rest under the juniper tree, and Jesus withdrew with his disciples for rest, so too, you and I need to make sure we replenish our resources on a regular basis.

Last weekend the women of Edgewood gathered for a retreat called, “Breathe.” They learned Sabbath was a gift given by God to the children of Israel to remind them they were no longer slaves in Egypt – they could stop working, and reflect on the things God had done for them. God gives us this same Sabbath principle – to find a time to set aside the activities and busyness that swallow up our rest and peace.

2. After getting recharged, Nehemiah **assessed the need**. We see this in verses 12-16. Nehemiah knew that in order to lead this project, he needed a firsthand picture of what needed to be done so he scouted out the damage to the walls one dark night.

Look at this map while I read these verses: *“Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King’s Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.”*



Nehemiah the “night rider” discovered at least three things during his assessment:

- It was a *demanding* job. The circuit of the walls was more than a mile long, and the new wall needed to be three or four feet thick, and fifteen to twenty feet high. Nehemiah knew that he and his people had to give their best to it. The same is true for us – kingdom work is demanding, but it’s worth everything we have.

- It was a *hazardous* assignment. Nehemiah went at night because there were enemies lurking around. He said nothing to anyone until the time was right.
- It was a *co-operative* venture. It was only by surveying the walls and gates that Nehemiah could calculate how the work should be divided. The word “*inspected*” has the idea of “*scrutinizing and examining*” and was used for probing a wound to see the extent of the damage.

I had the joy this summer of showing a photographer from the Dispatch/Argus around our facility during one of our Super Saturdays. As we moved from room to room, she told me she was impressed with three things – the teachers were totally prepared, the kids were very attentive and the Bible was clearly taught to every group. I realized she was not a Christ-follower so I left her in a room and went upstairs to get an *Anchor for the Soul* book. When I came back I couldn’t find her anywhere. When I eventually located her, she said, “*It feels like the catacombs down here!*” I told her that our facility project will enable us to have a secure children’s area in one section of the building with larger hallways that are easy to navigate.

I’m really pumped about the three main areas of focus for our facility renovation but first I wanted to give a parking lot update. You’ve seen the dirt-moving equipment but because of all the rain we’ve been slowed down.

1. **Increased fellowship space.** This will give us more space to connect with each other.
2. **Sanctuary improvements.** We’ll have better seating, lighting and sound while incorporating the overflows into the room.
3. **Children and Youth Area.** Over the last couple months, the deacons and staff have come up with an even better solution so we don’t have to add a complicated and costly addition. Guided by Aspen, we’ve been able to identify a solution that will steward our resources better. We’ve also figured out a way to have additional space for teenagers and the entire children’s area will be on one level.

As our project progresses, it’s been a joy to see how our leaders have stepped up. I’m especially grateful for...

- Jason Crosby and his work with the deacons and the Aspen team
- Rocky Jones for leading our Grow Time initiative

- John Bril and the trustees
- Sheila Kuriscak and Suzy Crosby for their work designing space for the nursery and childrens' area
- Pastor Chad and Vikki Huisman for all they've done with design and communications
- Sheila Mills and Marie Guyton for all the administrative support

I can't wait for all of us to say...look at what the Lord did!

It strikes me Nehemiah did not have all the plans figured out while he was still in Susa. But when he arrived and took a closer look by inspecting things more closely, he came up with a solution. The project was very fluid with a lot of moving parts – enemies were attacking, the builders get bummed out, and anxiety arises within the team. Nehemiah had to adjust as he went along...and so will we! The bottom line is Nehemiah was simply following the Lord's lead and that's what we're committed to do as well.

That leads us to the third task.

3. After replenishing his resources and assessing the need, Nehemiah next **recruited workers** in verse 17: ***“You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.”*** The word **“trouble”** refers to something in a bad condition. Let's look and see how he put his work force together:

Observe how he *identifies* with the workers: ***“You see the trouble we are in.”*** Nehemiah is passionately involved in the city's welfare and feels its woes as though he had lived in the desolate city all his life.

Next, he provides a *spiritual perspective*: ***“How Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned.”*** The sight of collapsed walls for well over a century had created the impression in the pagan mind the God of Israel had abandoned his people. He recognizes that there are always spiritual issues involved – a building project is more than just brick and mortar.

Then, he invites *immediate action* – everyone knows exactly what is required, ***“Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.”*** He's including himself in the problem *and* in the solution: ***“Come, let us build...”*** Nehemiah is asking a lot of the people and he's not afraid to urge them to step up to the plate. The sacrifices will be huge. They will have to take

time off from work in order to rebuild the walls. Who will protect their families? Before the people can respond they need to know that there is someone greater than Nehemiah behind this project.

4. That leads to the next task – Nehemiah **inspired confidence** in verse 18: *“And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me.”* While rebuilding the walls is an important job, the central theme in the book is the sufficiency of God.

Nehemiah didn’t reach Jerusalem because he was a skillful persuader, or because the queen was possibly a compliant helper, or because the king was a generous benefactor, but only because God was a sovereign provider. Since God had done all that, He would certainly help them to complete the task of rebuilding the walls.

By telling the people what God had already done, he was firing them up for what He was about to do. His appeal was positive as He focused on the glory and greatness of God. It’s quite amazing the people said, *“Let us rise up and build.”* They could have been apathetic – they had been living in the rubble for a long time and could have just stayed there or they could have reminded Nehemiah that the Jews had *“already tried that”* before and were stopped by the authorities.

We often face those same two obstacles within the church. Either *“we’re content with the way things are”* or, *“we tried that before and it didn’t work!”* I’m thankful that Team Edgewood responds much like the bold builders did in this chapter – because the gracious hand of our God is upon us.

5. The fifth task comes almost immediately after the decision to make an impact takes place: He **handled opposition**. Whenever we get serious about kingdom work, Satan will oppose us. The first two enemies have already been identified in verse 10. Now Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite are joined by Geshem the Arab. Let’s look at their tactics in verse 19: *“But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, ‘What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?’”*

They derided the efforts of the workers by jeering and despising them, which means they mocked them and held them in contempt. Verbal onslaughts have always been part of the enemy’s demoralizing tactics. They laughed at the workers and belittled both their provisions and their plans. When ridicule didn’t work, the enemies charged them with rebellion against the king.

I love how Nehemiah deals with these disrupters. He doesn't answer their lies or engage in a conversation with them. Nor does he just ignore them. Instead he exalts the God who called them to do the work in verse 20: ***“The God of heaven will make us prosper...”*** The word ***“prosper”*** means, *“to rush or break forth mightily with success.”*

Nehemiah wanted his people to know that God had everything in control. Even though the enemies essentially surrounded them – Sanballat to the north, Tobiah to the east and Geshem to the south – Psalm 34:7 says: ***“The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.”***

Let's go back to how Nehemiah rallied the remnant in verse 17: ***“Come, let us build...”*** The people respond in verse 18: ***“Let us rise up and build.”*** And Nehemiah then speaks boldly to the enemies of the project, ***“...and we his servants will arise and build...”***

The tools are now out of the toolbox – *waiting, trusting, praying, planning, and testifying*. Are you ready to pick them up and start using them? It's not enough to just rely on your “religious resume.” And the tasks are ready to be tackled – *replenish your resources, assess the need, recruit workers, inspire confidence, and handle opposition*. This is a continual commitment and a long term-task.

If we're going to be part of our *Grow Time Initiative*, and if we want to see God rebuild some things in our own lives, than we're going to need to rely on Him for a very long time. As Psalm 127:1 says, ***“Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”***

Brothers and sisters, what time is it? It's grow time!

Communion

Let's go back to what Nehemiah says to their enemies in verse 20: ***“...but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.”*** The word ***“portion”*** refers to a piece of property. Their opponents had no past right, no present prerogative to be there, and no future role in the city. Interestingly, ***“no claim”*** means *“no record, memorial or reminder.”*

This word was used to convey the essential quality of remembering something significant in the past. It was used of the stone monuments set up in Joshua 4:7 to

remind the Israelites of their deliverance from bondage: ***“So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever.”*** Numbers 5:15 refers to ***“a grain offering of remembrance, bringing iniquity to remembrance.”*** Esther 6:1 speaks of a ***“book of memorable deeds.”*** Exodus 12:14 says that the Passover is ***“a memorial day.”***

Communion has been given to those of us who claim Christ as a reminder of our redemption. We have received our portion and according to John 1:12 have been given the ***“right”*** to become children of God. The message of the Bible is that there are those whose names are recorded in the book of life and others who aren't.

If you've received Christ, God has a record of that in heaven. Communion is a reminder, a memorial meal so we never forget what He has done for us. The issue is not what's on our resume, but what's on His. He has all the tools and He completed all the tasks so we can be forgiven and free!

Just as the Israelites needed reminders, so do we. I did a Scripture search on the words *remember, reminder, remembrance and memorial* and came up with over 300 verses!

Listen as I read a very familiar text from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Pay attention to the word, ***“remembrance.”***

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

As we remember, we're prodded to reflect and repent in verses 28-29: ***“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”***

Distribution of Elements

New Member at 10:45 – **Robin Johnson**