

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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IT TAKES A TEAM

Nehemiah 2:11-3:5

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Let's recap where we are in the story of Nehemiah.

- Nehemiah was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes.
- Although the Jews had been allowed to return to Jerusalem almost one hundred years before, the walls of the city had still not been rebuilt.
- Nehemiah's brothers relayed the news to him while he was serving in the winter palace in Susa.
- The news deeply disturbed Nehemiah, and he immediately began to pray and ask for God's favor as he committed himself to helping rebuild the walls.
- King Artaxerxes eventually noticed and asked about Nehemiah's sadness.
- Nehemiah explained the situation in Jerusalem and requested approval to leave his post and to obtain the needed materials to rebuild the wall.
- The King granted Nehemiah's requests and gave him military protection for the journey.

Today's lesson – It Takes a Team -- has four points:

- Inspiring leaders recognize problems and potential.
- An effective team does not make excuses.
- A strong leader protects his team.
- A productive team works together for a common goal.

## 1- INSPIRING LEADERS RECOGNIZE PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

**SCRIPTURE:** Nehemiah 2:11-17

*I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days <sup>12</sup> I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. <sup>13</sup> By*

*night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. <sup>14</sup> Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; <sup>15</sup> so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. <sup>16</sup> The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.*

**EXPLANATION:** Nehemiah succinctly summarizes his trip in just four words, “I went to Jerusalem.” Although he did not feel that it was worth mentioning, you should keep a few things in mind. Susa, where Nehemiah was stationed in the king’s winter palace, was around 1,000 miles from Jerusalem. As such, Nehemiah’s journey would have taken about two months. While Nehemiah traveled with a military escort, it is not clear what happened to the guard after he arrived. Maybe he sent them back once he safely arrived at Jerusalem. For whatever reason, he did not initially announce his intentions. Instead, he rested for a few days and then took a clandestine tour of the destruction.

The problems were obvious. In fact, Nehemiah was not even able to complete his tour around the perimeter of Jerusalem because of the rubble and debris. Still, Nehemiah did not grow discouraged.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A diamond is a valuable gemstone, but you would not know it by the way it looks when it is first mined. In the beginning, it is a rough, unpolished stone. Miners have to know what to look for to discover it. Experts then have to sort the diamonds, cut and polish them, certify them, and eventually place them in jewelry. It’s a lot of work, and if those experts did not know better, they might easily say that it’s not worth the effort. But diamond experts do not ignore the problems or avoid the work, because they know the value of a diamond.

**APPLICATION:** In the same way, good leaders are realistic. They take a hard look at broken things. They review the areas that need improvement. They do not sugarcoat what’s wrong, but they also see the potential. They bring a fresh perspective and look for ways to inspire. Nehemiah had likely never been in Jerusalem. He definitely had never seen it in its heyday. He was born in captivity.

He never knew the city when it was a thriving place of commerce or the religious center of Israel. Yet, he had a vision for what it could be.

- Inspiring leaders recognize the problems and the potential.

## **2-AN EFFECTIVE TEAM DOES NOT MAKE EXCUSES**

**SCRIPTURE:** Nehemiah 2:17-18

*Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”<sup>18</sup> I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.*

**EXPLANATION:** Nehemiah was obviously concerned about the Jewish nation, but he was concerned about much more than its means of protection. He considered the broken walls to be a dishonor to God. The Jews were God’s chosen people, and they did not make that a secret. The poor condition of the walls and city announced to the world that they were vulnerable and brought ridicule. Their enemies mocked them and questioned their God’s power and their own self-control. Nehemiah rallied the people to do something about the problem, and the people responded.

**ILLUSTRATION:** The best motivator in the world cannot succeed if his team fails to cooperate. For example, in 2011 the Boston Red Sox baseball team had a stacked roster. However, they struggled throughout the season due to injuries and inconsistent play. As the playoffs approached, the Red Sox were in a tight race with the Tampa Bay Rays to gain a spot. Instead of stepping up and working harder, tension and disagreements characterized the team. When they were officially eliminated from playoff contention, the loss was credited in large part to their tendency to make excuses and blame others for their shortcomings.

**APPLICATION:** The people of Jerusalem could have made excuses. They could have said, “We’ve tried this before, and it did not work.” They had lived in this broken-down place for so long, it would have been easy for them to have said, “What’s the bother? We’re used to the mess now anyway.” But they did not. They were inspired by Nehemiah’s leadership. They recognized the problem. They saw

the potential, and they readily agreed to join in the work.

- Inspiring leaders recognize the problems and the potential.
- An effective team does not make excuses.

### **3-A STRONG LEADER PROTECTS HIS TEAM**

**SCRIPTURE:** Nehemiah 2:19-20

*But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. “What is this you are doing?” they asked. “Are you rebelling against the king?”<sup>20</sup> I answered them by saying, “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.”*

**EXPLANATION:** Nehemiah knew the hearts of these men. He knew that they felt threatened by the Jews and did not want the wall to be built. He also knew the setbacks that such men could cause. It had happened before. Busybody rulers from surrounding areas had complained to the king when Ezra first arrived years before. Outside interference had previously stopped the work. Nehemiah knew that someone had to put these men in their place.

**APPLICATION:** A good leader recognizes the enemy and is not afraid to call them out. He wants to not only protect the work but also his team.

- Inspiring leaders recognize the problems and the potential.
- An effective team does not make excuses.
- A strong leader protects his team.

### **4-A PRODUCTIVE TEAM WORKS TOGETHER FOR A COMMON GOAL**

**SCRIPTURE:** Nehemiah 3:1-5

*Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel.<sup>2</sup> The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zakkur son of Imri built next to them.<sup>3</sup> The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place.<sup>4</sup> Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz,*

*repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs. <sup>5</sup> The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.*

**EXPLANATION:** The work on the wall was organized and efficient. Chapter 3 outlines the diversity of the builders. Priests, rulers, merchants, goldsmiths, perfumers, and even women helped with the rebuilding efforts. Some of the people lived inside the wall. Some of the people had houses that were built into or very near the wall, and some people lived up to 12 miles away from the wall.

Large and difficult projects are rarely accomplished by one person. Nehemiah may have been the face of the rebuilding, but a team of workers was behind him. Most of these people probably had little to no construction experience. Yet that did not stop them. The priests did not say, “Our job is in the temple.” They pitched in and worked. The perfumers did not complain that the job was too smelly. The rulers did not complain that the work was beneath them. The only people who refused to work were the nobles of Tekoa. What a sad legacy for them to leave behind. In the midst of a chapter of workers, they go down in history as the ones who would not pitch in.

**APPLICATION:** As Christians, there is kingdom work to be done. Yes, some of that work is front and center. The people who stand on this stage each week get noticed, but the majority of the work takes place behind the scenes. There are Sunday School teachers and nursery workers and people who empty trashcans and clean toilets and vacuum the carpet. And the work of the church goes well beyond the church doors. There are needs to be met in our community, in our world. Much of the work is unglamorous. Some of it requires a person to get his hands dirty. Often, it’s hard. It always involves a sacrifice of time and sometimes money. Yes, spiritual leaders play a part, but the job is too big for a handful of people.

Are you helping build the kingdom, or are you refusing to do your part? Are you pitching in, or are you making excuses? Kingdom work takes a team.

- Inspiring leaders recognize the problems and the potential.
- An effective team does not make excuses.
- A strong leader protects his team.

- A productive team works together for a common goal.

**INVITATION:** As Christians, our goal should be to glorify God and encourage others to come to know him. What are you doing for the service of the Lord? God has a job for you. The altar is open if you want to come and pray about how you can take part in the great work of the church. If you are not a member of God's family, if you have never admitted your sins and committed your life to him, then you are still on the outside looking in. In fact, the Bible tells us that if you have rejected Christ as your Savior then you are an enemy of God. You are like those governors who Nehemiah chased away. But God wants you to be a part of his family and his work. The invitation is open. Come forward and I will tell you more about it.

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