

**Rebuilding the Wall  
Nehemiah 3**

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We can always find reasons to divide from others. We have just come through a federal election campaign. Politics, by its very nature, divides us into groups or factions. So we spend 36 days thinking about who we would or would not support. Many said the country came out of the election more divided than ever.

The pandemic has divided us. Think of how it has physically divided us since before the pandemic. We used to meet as one large body Sunday mornings at 10:45. Now a group meets in person at 9:30 and another group checks in online at 9:30. Then a different group meets at 11 and another group checks in online at 11. Some no longer connect with either. So we see at least 5 different physical divisions created by the pandemic.

On top of that, we can divide over public health measures, masks and the vaccines. Everyone has their viewpoints on those items. By now, we're all aware of the potential explosion when these topics come up.

Such tension is understandable since we're all coping with the additional stress that COVID has brought to our society. Someone shared with me recently a post they saw which said something like this. "Covid has made average people angry. And it has made already angry people crazy."

And some of you face tough decisions that may bring further division in your life. Your employer may be making vaccines mandatory and you don't know where you stand. Or you may be responsible for enforcing a vaccine mandate throughout your organization and face great resistance. We still have to deal with the normal stresses of life, illnesses and ongoing struggles. In this climate of division and stress, how can we come together as God's people to do His good work?

We depend solely on ourselves and our own efforts, it is impossible. We humans are experts at dividing and separating disagreements, dislikes or differences. But if we turn to the Lord and ask for His Spirit to bring unity among us, it is possible for us to come together as God's people to do His good work.

That happened in Jerusalem about 2400 years ago told in the Bible book Nehemiah. Last week we saw Nehemiah arrive in Jerusalem accompanied by a Persian military escort. After 3 days, he and a few men surveyed the destruction around Jerusalem's walls and gates. Then he gathers the people together and calls them to "build the wall of Jerusalem so that we may no longer suffer derision." Nehemiah informs them of the favor of the emperor and especially that God's hand was upon them for this good work. The people collectively agree to this. They say, "Let us rise up and build." Yet Nehemiah faces immediate opposition from three local governors. So he declares his trust in God to see this work through despite their opposition. Yet talk is cheap. It is one thing to say you're willing to come together to do God's work. It's another thing to actually do it.

We will see today what happens next. Then we will check our own attitude towards the work God has for us to do here – Regather, Reconnect and Invite Others for the sake of God's name. So please find Nehemiah 3 in your Bibles. Let's see how God brought together people for His good work.

### **Nehemiah 3 (ESV)**

**3 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. <sup>2</sup> And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them<sup>[a]</sup> Zaccur the son of Imri built.**

**<sup>3</sup> The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. <sup>4</sup> And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired. <sup>5</sup> And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.<sup>[b]</sup>**

**<sup>6</sup> Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Gate of Yeshanah.<sup>[c]</sup> They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. <sup>7</sup> And next to them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. <sup>8</sup> Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.**

Verses 9-16 describe the rebuilding of the wall all the way down to the king's garden and pool.

**<sup>9</sup> Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of<sup>[d]</sup> Jerusalem, repaired. <sup>10</sup> Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired. <sup>11</sup> Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-**

moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. <sup>12</sup> Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters.

<sup>13</sup> Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits<sup>[e]</sup> of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate.

<sup>14</sup> Malchijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

<sup>15</sup> And Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it and covered it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the city of David. <sup>16</sup> After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool, and as far as the house of the mighty men.

Verses 17-27 takes us back up the east side of the city.

<sup>17</sup> After him the Levites repaired: Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district. <sup>18</sup> After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah. <sup>19</sup> Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress.<sup>[f]</sup> <sup>20</sup> After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired<sup>[g]</sup> another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. <sup>21</sup> After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. <sup>22</sup> After him the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired. <sup>23</sup> After them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah repaired beside his own house. <sup>24</sup> After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress and to the corner. <sup>25</sup> Palal the son of Uzai repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh <sup>26</sup> and the temple servants living on Ophel repaired to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the projecting tower. <sup>27</sup> After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

Let's then read verses 28-32

<sup>28</sup> Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. <sup>29</sup> After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired. <sup>30</sup> After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired opposite his chamber. <sup>31</sup> After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate,<sup>[h]</sup> and to the upper chamber of the corner. <sup>32</sup> And between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.

This is a tough Bible reading that seems to have little relevance. It's like a list of people in the closing credit of a movie. No one reads that list yet without the people on that list there will be no movie.

Here we see people who actually rebuilt the wall.

## **What did God (through Nehemiah) do to bring His people together to do His good work?**

**He brought very different people together to do His work.** The list reveals a diverse cross section of society at that time. It includes clergy and non-clergy working on this wall. The high priest and priests build the sheep gate and its walls. Later we see Levites, other priests and temple servants joining in the work. Yet we also see many groups of non-priests.

The list includes commoners and rulers. Like Malchijah, ruler of a district; Shallum, ruler of the district of Mizpah; verse 14 – Nehemiah (not the subject of this book but a different Nehemiah); ruler of the half-district of Beth-Zur verse 16 and several more. Yet we also see common people who did not rule over anything equally participating in the rebuilding. I see God's work in bringing them together.

The list includes men and women. The men are identified by name. But in verse 12 we see evidence of the female builders. "Shallum, the son of Hallohesh, ruler of the half district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters." We also see people come from different towns and regions to help. It's not only residents of Jerusalem. Nehemiah identifies people from Tekoa, Jericho, Zanoah and Mizpah joining in the work.

Notice they worked side by side. The phrase "next to him" occurs again and again. Despite their differences in class, profession, gender and origin, they came together to do this good work of God.

Here at SVBC we have people with different nationalities, different skin color, different ethnicities and different ages. We come from different places – Sturgeon County; St Albert, Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Morinville. We come from different marital situations – Never Married; Married; Widowed; Divorced; Separated. We have people from different professions and jobs; teachers; doctors; laborers; tradespeople; nurses; dentists and other health care professionals; graphic designers; cooks, piano teachers; electricians; farmers of potatoes; grain; canola; engineers; accountants; military; homemaker; food industry; government workers. We have different opinions; different preferences in foods; art; music. We can always find something different about one another to separate about. Or we can celebrate that God has brought together: God brought different people together to rebuild the wall.

What else did God (through Nehemiah) do to bring His people together to do His good work? **He gave them different roles to play that all contributed to the overall work.** Archaeologists estimate that this wall was 4 km or 2.5 miles total as it surrounded the city. Nehemiah could have tried to build the wall himself. It would have taken years and likely remained undone because of Nehemiah's limited capacity and strength. Yet here we see the work divided into about 40 different groups. They didn't all work on the Sheep Gate. Each had their assignment. Their individual section contributed to the whole wall. The sum of the parts was greater than the individual pieces themselves.

When we come together as a body, we collectively benefit from one another's contribution. Some prepare coffee to contribute to our fellowship. Some join in music with members of a worship team. The media and sound people ensure we can see, hear and participate in worship. We join together to offer a children's ministry, youth ministry and small group ministry. Your collective prayers for those hurting or in need go far beyond what I could do alone as a pastor. Your giving enables us to keep the church going and support our missionaries and this facility for ministry. God uses all who participate to accomplish His good work through SVBC.

**God empowered the willing to do hard and dirty work.** Though chapter 3 contains a wonderful picture of people coming together on this great project, we must not sugar coat the work's difficulty along with the heat. Jerusalem is found in a hot and dry climate. Building walls with heavy stones involved back breaking sweat soaking labor. The work had to be done mostly by hand. It would take a supreme full time effort by those involved.

Did you notice the one mention of those who refused involvement? Verse 5 – “And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve the Lord.” They thought the work of rebuilding walls and gates was beneath them. Their unbending neck indicated their unwillingness to do hard and dirty labor. Sometimes the work God calls us to do is hard and messy. Ministry to people will get messy. It can be hard. Yet by God's strength, we can do this work in His power.

I notice one more way God (through Nehemiah) brought His people together to do this good work. **God inspired some to work outside their comfort zone (3:8).** Look at verse 8. “Next to them Uzziel

the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him, Hananiah, one of the perfumers repaired.” Rulers of half districts and priests participated. Goldsmith and perfumers did not train to learn wall building. Rulers administrated. Priests were in charge of worship and ministry to the people. None specialized in wall building. Yet here they repair the wall and working outside their comfort zone. God does equip His people with gifts and skills that we need to use. Yet we may need to guard against refusing to participate in something because it’s not our area of passion. This includes Christian basics like prayer, exercising faith and sharing the gospel. That last one is surely outside our comfort zone. Yet God calls us to step out in faith and do this good work. He will empower us to do it.

All this adds up to the following. **God unifies diverse people to accomplish His good work.** Yes, we can easily focus on our differences and refuse to come together. Or we can focus on our unity in Christ. Then we join together to do His good work through the community of His people called the church.

Some might look at Nehemiah 3 and conclude that this is just like any community wide project. Isn’t this what happens with charities? People from all different walks of life come together for the common good on a common project. Usually they have something that unites them. Maybe it’s a common connection like survivors of some trauma or a common cause like some illness that touched a family member. These are all worthy projects and purposes.

However there is something unique about the church and Christian works. Listen to Ephesians 2:19-22 – “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” Notice the household imagery. The apostles and prophets form the foundation. Jesus is the cornerstone. Christians are the temple of God corporately. We’re not only individually the dwelling place of God. When we come together we are corporately His gathering place. So with the church there is a Christ centered focus. We do the good works ultimately for the sake of His name. Our coming together involves

the creation of community among whom God dwells. 1 Peter 2:9-10 – says “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Becoming a Christian is not just about God and me; it’s about God and we; a holy nation; a people for his own possession.

God brought a diverse group of people together to accomplish His good work in rebuilding the walls in Jerusalem around 445 BC. God continues to bring diverse people together to accomplish His good work in churches today. Now, I know churches have problems, challenges and some difficult history. The church is imperfect and full of sinners. Without the churches I have been part of and the people in them, I would not be the person I am today. I was part of Brentview Baptist in Calgary. I grew up there. The gospel was planted in me there. I was baptized there; ministered to and encouraged by many people there.

Then I experienced Christian community at seminary and college. I met my wife there and made lifelong friends. I also grew dramatically in studying God’s Word there. I was part of Greenfield Baptist in south Edmonton. The patient people there allowed me to grow and learn as a pastor. Lori and I were married there and I experienced mentorship for the ministry. Then we were part of Nepean Baptist in Ottawa. This was a small community of loving people. I grew tremendously there in a different culture and setting. All our kids were born in Ottawa and dedicated at that church. Their generosity enabled me to continue in my learning and growing as a preacher.

Then there is this church – SVBC. – All of our kids were baptized here. They came through the children’s and youth ministry here. Our oldest daughter married here. We have been blessed by your encouragement and prayers over the years.

In all of these churches, we have met people from very diverse backgrounds. Yet they have contributed to the body of Christ and given us a taste of the dwelling place of God among His people.

So yes, the church is imperfect and it has its problems. But it is also the unique community of God's people where God resides and dwells among us. He has great works we can do together.

**How might you help regather, reconnect and invite others for the sake of God's name this Fall?** In the climate of division in which we find ourselves, how can we come together to join in God's good work.

**First, we must turn to the Lord and ask for His unifying work among us.** On our own, we will naturally divide and separate. But in Christ we can come together as one. Jesus demonstrated amazing unity with His Father through His time on earth. God has revealed Himself as the One God in Three Persons – Father, Son and Spirit. They work together in complete and perfect unity. So we need to prayerfully as individuals, couples, families and community ask the Lord to do His unifying work among us.

**Second, let us support one another through prayer, encouragement and participation.** If you are not already on the prayer chain, I would encourage you to join it. Contact [prayer@svbc.ab.ca](mailto:prayer@svbc.ab.ca). Then you will receive updates of people and church needs that you can pray about. When you see the people we're praying about, encourage them with a simple phrase like "I have been praying for you." That is a unifying statement. You can also support others by encouraging or affirming someone else in their ministry. Thank them for leading worship, playing on the worship team, serving coffee, helping out in kid's ministry or youth or on church leadership. We can also support each other by participating. One of the most encouraging actions you can do for others is to show up – whether it be in person at a worship service or online. Show up to your small group or ministry group. Your presence can be a huge blessing to another.

**Third, when strong look out for the weak. When weak, accept ministry from the strong.** Some of you here or watching online are doing great today. You feel strong and walk in the God's strength. Thank the Lord for that and then look around for someone to minister to or someone to encourage. Then act on that. Some of you here or watching on line are not doing well today. You may

be grieving, broken, discouraged or troubled. Will you accept the ministry of others who reach out to you? By receiving ministry, you can encourage those who reach out in love.

So three simple ways that each of us can participate in God's community at SVBC. Pray and ask God to do His unifying work among us. Support one another by praying, encouraging and participating. Then if strong, look out for the weak. If weak, accept the ministry of the strong. Many of you are already doing this.

But if we all do this, we will taste more deeply the beautiful work of God. He unifies diverse people to accomplish His good work.