

HOW GOD USES BEING REAL & TRANSPARENT TO HELP ME
Next Steps Devotional Guide — Nehemiah 2:1-11
Sermon Series: Nehemiah > Repair, Rebuild & Restore
Sunday, February 19, 2023
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1. The book called Nehemiah is about a man named Nehemiah. He was real, authentic, and transparent. We get to see his strengths and weaknesses. We will see when he is as fearless and courageous as a lion and when he is weak and afraid as a mouse.
 - a. Do you think most people today hide their flaws, failures, fears and lack of faith? Why or why not?
 - b. When you come to church, are you transparent and real with your flaws, failures and lack of faith? Why or why not?
 - c. Read Nehemiah 1:1a, 2:1a in your sermon outline. Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, has traveled over 800 miles across the desert from Jerusalem to Susa (Persia) to bring Nehemiah bad news. Upon hearing that bad news, Nehemiah spent 4 months pondering about how to respond, nursing pity/compassion for the Jews living there; getting preoccupied with having the right reaction; growing his passion to act when the time came; and praying. He did not want to have some kind of "knee-jerk" reaction. Think back over your life. What is a "knee-jerk" reaction you had and what did you learn from it?
2. If I want God to use others to meet a need in my life, I must be ready for any sudden opportunity to show and share my need/pain to others.
 - a. Read Nehemiah 2:1 in your sermon outline. Have you ever waited month after month for an answer from God? Have you ever waited year after year for an answer from God? What were you waiting for God to do?
 - b. Sometimes God allows us to feel as if we are in some kind of emotional and/or spiritual prison for a greater good that we cannot see at that time. Take your Bible and read Acts 16:16-34. Paul and Silas found themselves literally in prison for sharing the Gospel. Yet, they saw this as an opportunity for a greater good. What was that?
 - c. Read Nehemiah 2:1b-2a in your sermon outline. For 4 months Nehemiah had kept his sadness, grief and depression hidden from King Artaxerxes. Everyone has a breaking point and on this day, Nehemiah had his. On this day, the king noticed Nehemiah's countenance was different. Can people read your countenance and body language or do you keep hidden things that are troubling you? Why or why not?
 - d. Read Nehemiah 2:2b in your sermon outline as well as the explanation for the Hebrew word translated as "sad." You were given 3 possible reasons why King Artaxerxes was suspicious of why Nehemiah was "sad." All 3 reasons were probably true in some way. What scares you about people learning about your fears, your failures, your flaws, and your lack of faith? What can you learn from Nehemiah's transparency?
 - e. Read Nehemiah 2:3 in your sermon outline. Perceiving the king's suspicion, Nehemiah quickly wishes the king a long life and tell the king why he is sad. Yet, Nehemiah was both tactful and diplomatic. In the last part of verse 3, Nehemiah never refers to Jerusalem. In his explanation, Nehemiah used the phrase "*the place of my father's graves*." King Artaxerxes possessed Jerusalem and Judah by the fact that Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BC. Babylon had conquered Israel and Judah previously. Nehemiah saves the king from being embarrassed and humiliated. How? Instead of saying, "*Jerusalem and Judah*," Nehemiah said "*the place of my father's graves*." King Artaxerxes was indirectly responsible for the present conditions in and around Jerusalem. Think of someone who is either directly or indirectly responsible for some pain in your life. How could you bring this up and at the same time help them save face?
3. If I want God to use others to meet a need in my life, I must be ready for a surprising offer of help.
 - a. Read Nehemiah 2:4a in your sermon outline. Are you surprised by the king's reaction to Nehemiah? Explain.
 - b. Read Proverbs 21:1 in your sermon outline and the explanation of the Hebrew words translated as "*channels*" and "*turns*." If we were to paraphrase Proverbs 21:1, it would read like this: "*Like irrigation canals carrying water, so is the heart of anyone in Yahweh's hand. He causes their heart to bend in whatever direction He pleases.*" When and where have you personally seen God do this?
4. If I want God to use others to meet a need in my life, I must offer a short prayer to God about what I need at the moment they ask.
 - a. Read Nehemiah 2:4b in your sermon outline. Once King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah what he needed, Nehemiah in that exact moment prayed to God. He threw out one of those "SOS Prayers" — a quick silent prayer. Though we are not told what he prayed, he may have prayed what he told us he prayed in Nehemiah 1:11. Read this in your sermon outline.
 - b. Read Lamentations 3:25 and Psalms 27:14 in your sermon outline. Would you say that when it comes to waiting, you are the most patient person in the world? When it comes to waiting on God, are you patient?
 - c. Is there anything you are waiting on God to do or a prayer you waiting for God to answer? If so, what is it and how are you doing with this in the waiting period?
 - d. There are times we simply throw up a short prayer to God in the panic of the moment, but these kind of prayers are best preceded by consistent praying. Are you a consistent prayer? Why or why not? If so, how has this affected your trust and waiting on God? If not, how do you think this would help you when waiting on God to answer a prayer for you?

5. If I want God to use others to meet a need in my life, I must be ready to submissively appeal to others with my real needs, not my wants. Read Nehemiah 2:5 in your sermon outline. Nehemiah informs the king what the basic needs he requires to repair the wall around Jerusalem. There were no extra amenities in his request to the king. When it comes to doing this, what would you say are your needs as defined by Scripture, versus wants as defined by society or self?
6. If I want God to use others to meet a need in my life, I have to wait to see if there are any other subtle influences God has to help me. Read Nehemiah 2:6 in your sermon outline. It is amazing how God works. Sitting next to King Artaxerxes is what we would call “The Queen Mother” — Esther. She had been the queen for Artaxerxes father, King Xerxes. It was unusual in the Persian Empire for a “queen” to be sitting with the king. Therefore, this implies that both kings had developed a trust for Esther’s wisdom, insight, guidance and her walk with God. She is the one that influenced King Artaxerxes to let Nehemiah return to Jerusalem. This comes “out of the blue” but it is not coincidence. This is God’s providence and God’s sovereignty at work. Where have you experienced this in your own life? How did it impact God’s answer to your prayer? How did it impact you? What did you learn from this? How could you help others with this truth?
7. If I want God to use others to meet a need in my life, I need to have a solid plan to share with the people God will use to help me.
 - a. Read Nehemiah 2:7-8a in your sermon outline. The Hebrew text seems to imply that even though Nehemiah has never built anything, he had talked to builders in the Persian Empire. This is why he had some idea and plan of what would be required to rebuild the wall. Nehemiah presents what he needs as a personal issue to King Artaxerxes, not as a political issue for the king. Thus helping the king to save face, not be embarrassed or humiliated. Why was this wise?
 - b. Read Proverbs 16:7 in your sermon outline. Nehemiah just throws everything out as to see what will stick, what he perceives is necessary to rebuild the wall. Remember — he only presents needs, not wants. He even asks King Artaxerxes to pay for all this. Why do you think King Artaxerxes agreed to do this? What does this say to you about how God can use others with a plan you have for a need?
 - c. Nehemiah presents to the king a plan he had been working on for 4 months. This is amazing that King Artaxerxes agreed to fund this rebuilding, repairing and restoring project some 800 miles away. Have you ever had someone help pay for a need you had? Why do you think they did this? How did you respond?
8. In the sermon outline, you were given at the end a couple of points of application.
 - a. Read Nehemiah 1:11 and Nehemiah 1:1, 2:1a in your sermon outline. Babylon conquered both Israel and Judah, which included Jerusalem in 3 military campaigns in 606 BC, 598 BC and 586 BC. The nation was destroyed. The temple was destroyed and the wall around Jerusalem was destroyed. Nearly 120,000 Jews were deported over 800 miles across desert to live as slaves serving the Babylonian Empire and Babylonian people. Then in 539 BC, Persia conquered Babylon and was the recipient of every nation Babylon had conquered. This is now 445 BC and King Artaxerxes has done nothing to repair, rebuild or restore anything in Jerusalem. So, in some way King Artaxerxes was personally responsible for the on-going devastation to Jerusalem. Nehemiah has waited for 4 months for God to open the door for him to talk to the king about this. Who are you waiting on to have a discussion with and what issue do you to discuss with them and why?
 - b. When we are waiting on God, sometimes a delay can seem like a denial. That is not necessarily always true and here is why. Nehemiah had to learn that before God can do something through you, God has to do something in you. God was not just preparing Jerusalem for Nehemiah; God was preparing Nehemiah for Jerusalem. What do you think that was for Nehemiah? What do you think that would be for you?
9. A second point of application was when God comes through for you, never accept credit for it personally. Give all the credit to God.
 - a. Read Nehemiah 2:8b in your sermon outline. Nehemiah gave all the credit to God by saying, “*because the gracious hand of God was on me.*” Right now, in which areas have or are you taking credit for something God has done for you by mentioning your skills, or abilities, or experiences, or your education or your wisdom, or your wit, or your talents, or your street smarts or whatever? Pray right now asking God to forgive you. Then prove you are real and authentic by making sure everyone you told previously, giving yourself credit, now tell them the amended addition — you give God all the credit.
 - b. Read Nehemiah 2:9-10 in your sermon outline. Notice Nehemiah used the word “*someone*” to refer to himself. He did not say “*the cupbearer of the king has come*” or “*the leader chosen by God has come*” but simply “*someone had come.*” In what way or term could you use to do the same thing? Jesus said this in *John 3:30*, “*He (God) must increase and I must decrease*” (ESV). Where and how do you need to do this as well?
10. The sermon began telling how we got the phrase “*the real McCoy*.”
 - a. How real are you? How transparent are you with your fault, flaws, failures and lack of faith to others? How transparent are you with others about your sins, your struggles and your selfishness? Your addictions? When people see you, would they call you “the real McCoy”? Why or why not?
 - b. It has been said, “*Your transparency will lead to other people’s transformation and trust in you.*” Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
 - c. Take your Bible and read the following: Proverbs 11:3, Proverbs 17:17 and Proverbs 18:24. Though the word “*transparency*” is not mentioned in any of them, it is implied. Look at each Proverb individually. Since “*transparency*” is implied in each Proverb, what does each Proverbs then say about it? Where in your own life do you need to apply this?