

# **BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS**

## **Ezra Nehemiah Esther**

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*People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).*

### **Nehemiah**

Chapter 2:9-20

### **"Walleyed"**

#### **Introduction**

You may have seen an x-ray of Homer Simpson's head. (For those of you who don't know it, Homer Simpson is a cartoon character; I'm not divulging any medical confidentiality). He has an enormous head, but he can be pretty dumb. The x-ray reveals a peanut-sized brain within his huge cranium.

Comical x-rays like that are a common prank in cartoons. They intend to show you what is really going on in the mind of the character.

What if we drew a cartoon x-ray of **your** head? What images would represent what's on your mind? Better yet: What images should be on your mind?

We know what was on Nehemiah's mind. He was all about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. If you could see a cartoon drawing of an x-ray of Nehemiah's head, you'd see images relating to his work for the Lord.

The Jews at Jerusalem should have built the walls. They had lost their heart for the work. Nehemiah's coming renewed their heart to build.

You and I are either like Nehemiah; or we're like the Jews at Jerusalem. We're either all about working for God; or we've lost our heart for the work.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Stimulate Your Heart For The Lord's Work, and #2 Safeguard Your Heart In The Lord's Work

#1 Stimulate Your Heart  
For The Lord's Work  
(v11-18)

The Jews in our text were once like Nehemiah. They had returned to Jerusalem with hearts filled with the images of doing the Lord's work. Somewhere along the way, because of obstacles and opposition, they had abandoned the work.

Even if you are all about the Lord's work, there is a danger that obstacles and opposition will combine to get you to abandon it.

Nehemiah's attitudes and activities encourage us in ways to maintain or regain our heart for the Lords work. We'll look first at verses eleven through eighteen.

[Nehemiah 2:11 So I came to Jerusalem...](#)

These first few words remind you of the prequel to this story. Previously Nehemiah had been praying for God to do something about the deplorable condition of the walls. God revealed to Nehemiah that He was going to do something. He was going to send him – Nehemiah – to Jerusalem to lead the work!

Nehemiah was sent; and he went. God stimulates your heart to do His work. You must respond by getting personally involved in it.

Nehemiah was sent; he went; the first thing he did was wait:

[Nehemiah 2:11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days.](#)

Three days doesn't seem like much of a wait. But remember this: *The wall would be built in only fifty-two days!* Three days is a big number when it's taken out of fifty-two.

It reminds us that God has a timetable. Sometimes you work; sometimes you wait. Once your heart is stimulated, you might be asked to wait for years or decades.

Often it is the waiting that takes its toll on your work. Raising kids is like that, is it not? You can grow weary in well-doing waiting to see the end result. Often parents lose their focus just at the most critical time.

[Nehemiah 2:12](#) Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me...

There are several things to note in this verse.

First, Nehemiah [arose in the night](#). He was seeking while others slept. Burdens for serving God are lost when we sleep instead of doing the spiritual work of seeking God in prayer and Bible study.

You don't have to be asleep to sleep. You can be wide awake, but spiritually asleep. Material concerns... anxiety... worry... All these and more can tire us for serving God.

Next you note that he [took a few men with him](#). On a practical level, he was going to enlist their aid. On a spiritual level, he was going to disciple them.

All of us need to be disciplers, and to be disciplined. It can be a regular time of meeting with a few people; or it can be a focus on one or a few persons. It can be formal; it can be informal. It can be a class; or it can be casual.

[Nehemiah 2:12](#) Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem...

Nehemiah didn't tell anyone yet what God had put in his heart to do. You'd think he would have made a big deal about it; advertised it; send direct mailings. It tells us that burdens are *caught* more than they are *taught*. You can't just see a need and try to stimulate other people to meet it. You must get personally involved.

Nehemiah 2:12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode.

A night inspection of the walls was dangerous. After all, that's when wild beasts or wicked men would breach the city. You'd think Nehemiah would want the military escort that had guarded him on the journey to Jerusalem. He brought none of them, and only one animal. He had no fear.

Fear can stop us in our tracks when opportunities to serve present themselves. We need to quit looking to the resources of the world and trust that, even with minimal material help, we are spiritually equipped for the work.

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 2:14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but *there was* no room for the animal under me to pass.

Nehemiah 2:15 So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned.

We will see the significance of these, and the other, gates in future studies. Nehemiah surveyed the actual damage. He did it alone, in the dark; but he 'saw' more than all the others had seen in many days when the sun was shining.

God wants you to have a kind of night-vision to see things others do not. It's a picturesque way of describing the fact that you have a unique place of service in the Church; a unique gifting and calling. Don't get discouraged if no one else sees a certain work that needs to be done. They are given their own night vision.

At the end of verse fifteen Nehemiah says he **returned**. It might mean he returned from his night survey, not just to the small group that was with him, but to the city in order to hold a meeting the next day. We read of such a meeting in the next few verses:

Nehemiah 2:16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.

He gathered together the official leadership of Jerusalem. Note this: Even though these guys were blowing it by not stimulating the hearts of the people to rebuild the walls, Nehemiah still respected their offices. God does not want us to work independently from the Church.

Nehemiah 2:17 Then I said to them, “You see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lies* 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.”

It may have seemed obvious, but he first reviewed the need. More than that: He put it in a new context. It wasn't just that they were in danger from beasts and robbers. Their condition was a reproach to God.

Your heart must be stimulated by the proper motive. God's glory should be your motive in all things done in His name.

Nehemiah 2:18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me...

Earlier we read that God had placed this work in Nehemiah's heart. Nehemiah was then able to point to things that confirmed his work. This wasn't his idea; he wasn't promoting himself or his own agenda.

Your heart must be stimulated by the right person. It must be stimulated by God and not by yourself or others. You're the servant; He's the Master.

Nehemiah 2:18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, “Let us rise up and build.” Then they set their hands to *this good work*.

Their hearts and Nehemiah's heart were now in the same place. There was a unity of purpose – to glorify God.

Any work for the Lord involves many of His servants. We must strive for unity of purpose. We must care more for God's glory than our own part in the work.

Their hearts were once again stimulated for the Lord's work. As they set out to rebuild the walls, they would face the same obstacles and opposition that had shut-down their hearts before.

Verses nine, ten, nineteen and twenty remind us to

## #2 Safeguard Your Heart In The Lord's Work (v9-10 & 19-20)

Any work for the Lord will be challenged by forces that are against the Good News of Jesus. A huge part of safeguarding your heart is to realize you are constantly engaged in a wrestling match against sinister forces.

Some tips on safeguarding your heart against these forces are in the remaining verses.

Nehemiah 2:9 Then I went to the governors *in the region* beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.

Your work for the Lord takes place in a world that has its own government. The government may be helpful; or it may be harmful.

- being changed to bring change -  
By government, we're not just talking about Washington or Sacramento, or the City or the County. The place you work, or your school, is governed by others who are over you, who you answer to.

Whether it's helpful or harmful, God allows government over you. Especially when it's harmful, you have a tendency to lose heart serving the Lord. *Don't lose heart!* Discover how you can serve the Lord despite official opposition.

Even when the overall situation is helpful, persons within your government will be harmful:

Nehemiah 2:10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard *of it*, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

These two guys will oppose Nehemiah at every turn. Though described by regions they came from, both of these men seem to have Hebrew ancestry. Both had connections with Jews in Jerusalem.

They are a sad but important reminder that you sometimes face opposition from among the very people you are called to serve. I can think of no greater discouragement over the years than the attacks from among the fellowship. They will kill your heart to work for the Lord quicker than any other strategy the enemy can employ.

There are principles for overcoming them, it's revealed in Nehemiah's answer – in verses nineteen and twenty.

Before we see the principles, we see some specific ways people can be used to discourage you in your work for the Lord.

Nehemiah 2:19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"

They **laughed**. No one likes to be laughed at, or to be made fun of. It's demeaning and defeating. When we are called upon to walk by faith, it's often a source of humor to others.

They **despised**. All of us want to fit in and be accepted. It exerts a powerful pressure to quench our work for the Lord.

They said, **What is this thing that you are doing?** Having no understanding of the Lord's work, people can think it a foolish waste of time. While our neighbors and co-workers and fellow students are out seemingly enjoying themselves, we are busy serving God. If you don't safeguard your heart, you can begin to agree with them.

They said, **Will you rebel against the king?** In fact, Nehemiah had the support of the king; but they didn't see it. When you serve the Lord, you have the support of your King – but those who oppose you don't see it and won't recognize it. They try to frighten you, telling you that you might lose your job or fail a class if you don't fit in and go along with the program.

How can you remain encouraged and stimulated against such opposition?

Nehemiah 2:20 So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

Let's note two things:

1. First, Nehemiah did not defend himself. He could have produced letters from King Artaxerxes; but he didn't. Don't succumb to the natural tendency to defend yourself.
2. Second, Nehemiah refused to become distracted. He didn't answer them point-by-point, or waste much time responding. Stay focused on your work, not on the opposition.

I would say that the single most important principle revealed in his answer is this: He kept his focus on the Lord, putting Him first in his answer.

The way to defeat discouragement from among the ranks is to do your work as unto the Lord and not for men. It's hard; but it's both possible and necessary if your heart is to be safeguarded and remain stimulated.

On an everyday, practical level: No matter your work for the Lord, look past the opposition to Him and His glory.

1. Husband: It's not for your sake that you are to love your wife as Christ loves the Church. It is for Him and His glory.
2. Wife: It's not for your sake that you are to submit to your husband. It is unto the Lord – for Him and His glory.

The same is true in whatever relationship or situation you find yourself in. If you are working for the Lord and His glory, your heart cannot help but remain stimulated.