

BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS

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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).

Text

Nehemiah 7:1-73

Topic

Nehemiah readies Jerusalem's spiritual infrastructure in order to attract residents back to the city

Title

A Master's-Planned Community

Nehemiah 7:1 Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, Nehemiah 7:2 that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

Nehemiah 7:3 And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand *guard*, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

Nehemiah 7:4 Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt.

Nehemiah 7:5 Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first *return*, and found written in it:

Nehemiah 7:6 These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city.

Nehemiah 7:66 Altogether the whole assembly was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty,

Nehemiah 7:67 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred and forty-five men and women singers.

Nehemiah 7:68 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five,

Nehemiah 7:69 *their* camels four hundred and thirty-five, *and* donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

Nehemiah 7:70 And some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly garments.

Nehemiah 7:71 Some of the heads of the fathers' *houses* gave to the treasury of the work twenty thousand gold drachmas, and two thousand two hundred silver minas.

Nehemiah 7:72 And that which the rest of the people gave *was* twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priestly garments.

Nehemiah 7:73 So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, *some* of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. When the seventh month came, the children of Israel *were* in their cities.

Introduction

If a Los Angeles businessman has his way, a barren slice of land in southern Kings County will become a lush, state-of-the-art town of 100,000 people. The entrepreneur filed an application in Hanford last week to begin the planning process he hopes will culminate in the creation of a 30,000-home oasis off Interstate 5 just north of the Kings-Kern county line (Hanford Sentinel article).

These master-planned communities are becoming popular. There's one opening, on a smaller scale, in the Clovis area. Instead of a subdivision of homes within a city, these master-planned communities can be new cities, or self-contained communities within existing cities.

- being changed to bring change -

Our text is about a master-planned community. With the wall around Jerusalem complete, Nehemiah turned his attention to planning the city's infrastructure in order to attract residents.

Our point of contact with the account is this: **You and I as the Church are a master-planned community.** It would be more accurate to say we are a Master's-planned community. Jesus is the Master; it is His Church; we live in community according to His plan, laid out for us in the Bible and especially the New Testament.

When I see this chapter from that viewpoint, I'm suddenly very interested in it. What can Nehemiah teach me – teach us – about the infrastructure of a Master's-planned community?

He can teach us at least two things:

1. It's the Master's plan for us to always be ready to serve.
2. It's the Master's plan to always be reaching to save.

We'll organize our thoughts around those two points: #1 Let's Be Ready To Serve, and #2 Let's Be Reaching To Save.

#1 Let's Be Ready To Serve (v1-3)

We learn in verse four that there were **few people** living in the city of Jerusalem. Even though there were **few people**, Nehemiah established a spiritual infrastructure. He readied servants and ministries to serve God's people. He wanted to be ready to serve.

Whether the people we minister to in the Church are few or many, we should have a spiritual infrastructure in place with servants and ministries ready to serve God's people. It is that infrastructure, and our readiness, that we want to highlight in the opening three verses.

The very first thing mentioned is worship:

Nehemiah 7:1 Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed,

- being changed to bring change -

The **gatekeepers** in this verse are the men who were posted at the doors of the Temple. They, along with the Temple **singers** and the **Levites**, had all been working on the wall. Now that the wall was completed, they returned to their normal duties in assisting the worship.

Nehemiah's first priority was to have the Temple open and ready, staffed with the necessary personnel so that a worshipper could experience the presence of God.

Remember: Very few people were in the city. Still, the **gatekeepers** were on their post; the **singers** were lifting up their songs; the **Levites** were ready.

We could compare ourselves as a Church on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. We should be open and ready, staffed with the necessary personnel so that a worshipper can come and experience the presence of God.

We should be prepared before we arrive; we should arrive on time (which means earlier than necessary!); we should stay focused on our task or tasks.

What if no one comes? Or if the only ones who come are the usual folks? *It makes no difference!* We are doing our service as unto the Lord.

Nehemiah began to delegate responsibility. As he did, we see the qualities we should cultivate in our lives if we are to be ready to serve.

Nehemiah 7:2 that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

Hanani was Nehemiah's brother; but it wasn't because of family ties that he gave him a position of responsibility. Earlier in this story, it was Hanani who first brought the report to Nehemiah of the deplorable conditions in Jerusalem. His heart for the people of God is what had started in motion the events that led to the rebuilding and repairing of the wall. Hanani had been raised-up by God. The fact he was related to Nehemiah was not a help to his getting a position; but neither was it a hindrance. It was his relationship with God that mattered.

Hananiah is described as being **faithful** and fearful. He had proven himself faithful during the building of the wall; he was a man who **feared God**.

There are, then, these three qualities we want to cultivate in our lives if we want to be ready to serve:

1. Hanani had the quality of being **focused**. His only concern, and his every thought, was for the ministry.

2. Hananiah was **faithful**. There's no getting around it; you are either proven faithful, or you are flakey.
3. Hananiah was also **fearful**. His personal walk with the Lord was the source of his strength to serve. He understood Who he was serving – God, not man.

Nehemiah had focused, faithful, fearful men whose priority was to facilitate the worship of God so that God's people could experience God's presence. The spiritual infrastructure was almost complete. He had only to see to the protection of the worshippers.

Nehemiah 7:3 And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand *guard*, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

Even with the walls and gates in place, Jerusalem and its inhabitants would always be in danger. Nehemiah wanted both stationary and patrolling guards to be appointed and he gave them specific duties with regards to the opening and closing of the gates.

We must guard carefully the ministry God has given us. We cannot let the enemy come in to disrupt the joy of our fellowship and worship. We must remain **fixed** on our spiritual priorities.

Here is how I like to think of this. I like to think about the most needy person in our midst. I'm not necessarily looking for that person; I may not even recognize their need. It could be a new person I've never met before; it could be someone I've known for years. Who but God knows the heartache they may be experiencing behind the façade? A child causing them grief... A marriage in trouble... Beset with life-dominating sins... Downcast, despondent, in debt...

The truth is, there are many who are the most needy! We do not have the luxury of slacking-off, lest they go away even more needy – thinking that even Jesus has ignored them because we were not ready to serve them.

If I go about my serving, my ministry, with focus, faithfulness, and fear, then that person will be ministered to by God the Holy Spirit. If,

on the other hand, I lose focus; or am flakey; or fear man rather than God; or am distracted by the tactics of the enemy... Then I will not facilitate a worship environment in which ministry can occur.

Focus... faithfulness... fear (of God)... fixed on keeping the enemy out. You know if these describe you or not. Cultivate them and you will be ready to serve God by serving His people.

#2 Let's Be Reaching To Save (v4-73)

God saves people, not us. Salvation, though, is just the beginning. Theologians describe salvation as a process that involves three phases:

1. First, you are saved. You believe on the Lord, Jesus Christ, and you are saved for all eternity.
2. Second, you are being sanctified. *You're not in eternity yet!* You are still on the earth, in a body of flesh. Day-by-day you are being changed to become more-and-more like Jesus as you obey His Word and yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit.
3. Third, you will one day be glorified. Whether you are resurrected or Raptured, you will be given a new, glorified body that is free from sin. God will have completed the good work of salvation that He began in you.

The doctrine of salvation thus suggests that we should see to it that people get saved, and that they grow in their sanctification as they await the return of the Lord to glorify them.

We'll see something like that in the remaining verses. First let's get the context, in verse four.

Nehemiah 7:4 Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt.

Again I remind you that Nehemiah established a complex infrastructure well before people actually arrived. We must be proactive in ministry, not just reactive.

Notice that the **houses were not rebuilt**. There is a spiritual analogy there for us. In many cases, when we encounter people, their houses are in shambles. Not physically, but spiritually. Their lives are a mess! They need Jesus to come into their lives and put things in order.

Nehemiah wanted to attract people to live in Jerusalem – but only if they were Jews who could prove their genealogy.

Nehemiah 7:5 Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first *return*, and found written in it:

Nehemiah 7:6 These *are* the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city.

You could only live in Jerusalem if you could prove you were a Jew and were **registered**. It reminds us that, while everyone is welcome to attend services, our goal should not be numbers, but members. In other words, we should be concerned whether or not a person is saved. We should have a strong emphasis on letting folks know that they must be born-again to gain Heaven and avoid Hell. We want them to know that their name is written in God's registry in Heaven – in the Lamb's Book of Life.

If you are upset that we are not going to pay much attention to the list of names, I refer you to our previous study in Ezra, chapter two. Ezra records this same list; when we studied Ezra, we looked at nine different groupings within these names and made applications to our own lives.

Drop down to verse seventy-three:

Nehemiah 7:73 So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, *some* of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. When the seventh month came, the children of Israel *were* in their cities.

The **seventh month** was a special and important time in the national life of Israel. It was when three of her major feasts occurred: The

Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Because Nehemiah had worked hard to establish the infrastructure, the people could come, and the feasts could be celebrated. They could see God revealed in the symbols and types as they went through the various ceremonies. They could get their hearts right with God; they could put their spiritual houses in order.

Let's be reaching to save in these same ways:

1. First, we'll need to be ready to serve. Focused... faithful... fearful... and fixed.
2. Then, we need to emphasize the need for salvation, and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to save from the uttermost.
3. Finally, we must keep worship as our priority. The Church exists, first and foremost, for Jesus.

Here are some other words that might help you remember these same three things: Exalt, edify, evangelize.

1. The purpose of the Church on earth is to exalt Jesus Christ. Period. Thus, we are not *driven* to do anything, but are led by the Holy Spirit to worship Him.
2. If we are exalting Jesus, then we will want to edify His people. We will want to minister to them; to serve them. Primarily, we will want to follow the example of the first apostles and teach the Word of God.
3. If we are exalting Jesus, then we will want to evangelize those who are not saved. We will tell them the truth about their sin, the risen Savior, and His salvation.