

Faith That Prays, Plans, and Acts

I. Announce:

- A. Welcome to those watching online.
- B. Slide1-5 Men's. At Risk. Baptism. Food Drive. CFLC/Dutch Bros.
- C. Slide6a Prayer: Lord, as You did with Nehemiah, give us **hearts** that pray, **wisdom** to prepare, and **courage** to obey when You open the door.

II. Slide6b Intro: *Faith That Prays, Plans, and Acts*

- A. Theme: God advances His work through prayerful people *who trust His providence, count the cost, and courageously take action.*
- B. Big idea: Faith does not merely recognize what is broken; *it depends on God, makes a wise plan, and steps forward in obedience.*
- C. **When the burden becomes a calling:**
- D. Nehemiah 1 ends with Nehemiah *praying* about Jerusalem's broken walls.
- E. Chapter 2 begins roughly 4 months later, when an opportunity finally opens b4 him.
 - 1. During those months, Nehemiah has **not** forgotten the burden God placed upon his heart. *He has prayed, waited, and prepared.*
- F. Slide6c This reminds us that God's delays are not necessarily God's *denials*.
 - 1. **Waiting time can be preparation time.** While Nehemiah was waiting for the circumstances to change, God was preparing Nehemiah for the moment when they would. [Prayerful Preparation Precedes Possibility]
- G. The question in chapter 1 was, *"What breaks your heart?"*
The question in chapter 2 is, *"What are you prepared to do about it?"*

III. Slide7 1. FAITH WAITS FOR GOD'S OPPORTUNITY (1-3)

- A. 1 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. 2 And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick?"

This is nothing but **sadness** of the heart.” Then I was **very much afraid**.³ I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

B. When Nehemiah enters the king’s presence, the king notices the sadness on his face.

1. Nehemiah has never appeared **sad** before him, and he becomes “**very much afraid**.”
2. **His fear is understandable**. A servant was expected to *maintain a pleasant appearance* before the king, **and** the king could interpret sadness as *dissatisfaction* or *disloyalty*.

C. **Nehemiah does not allow his fear to silence him.**

1. When the king asks why he is sad, **Nehemiah respectfully explains that the city where his ancestors are buried lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire**. He **does not** manipulate the moment, exaggerate the problem, or demand that the king act. **He simply speaks the truth** when God gives him the opportunity.

D. **Nehemiah has waited for months, but waiting has not made him passive.**

1. **He recognizes that this conversation** may be the answer to the prayer he prayed in ch.1. **The open door arrives in the form of *a difficult question* from a powerful king, and Nehemiah must decide whether he will step through it.**

E. Where might God be asking us to speak honestly even though we feel afraid?

Have we mistaken waiting on God for avoiding responsibility?

Could the uncomfortable conversation in front of us actually be the opportunity for which we have been praying?

1. **Faith does not mean** that we never feel afraid. **Faith means** that ***fear does not get the final word*** when God gives us an opportunity to obey.

IV. Slide8a **2. FAITH PRAYS AND MAKES A WISE PLAN (4-8)**

A. 4 Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.” 6 And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. 7 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, 8 and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, **for the good hand of my God was upon me.** (Ezra 7:6,9,28. 8:18,22,31)

1. **Slide8b** What does this last phrase suggest/imply? His **presence** b4 His purpose
 - a) Echos the Exodus tradition, *God’s mighty hand & outstretched arm.* Rescued Is.
 - b) It gave recruits courage to join the work. Understanding that success is from God.

B. The king asks Nehemiah, “*What are you requesting?*” Before Nehemiah answers, **he prays to the God of heaven.** [what’s best: long prayers or short prayers?]

1. **This is likely not a long, public prayer.** It is a brief, silent cry for help in the middle of a critical conversation. **The two belong together:** *His spontaneous prayer is supported by an established life of prayer (ch.1).*

C. **Nehemiah then gives the king a clear answer.**

1. **He asks to be sent to Judah so that he can rebuild Jerusalem.**
2. When the king asks *how long the journey will take*, Nehemiah provides a timeframe. He also asks for **letters** guaranteeing **safe travel** **and** authorization to receive **timber** for the gates, the city wall, and his future residence/condo.

D. **Nehemiah’s detailed response reveals that prayer & planning are not enemies.**

1. **He had trusted God while also thinking carefully about what the mission would require.** His plan did not demonstrate a lack of faith; it demonstrated that he was **prepared** to act when God opened the door.

a) Sometimes we say that we are waiting on God when we have **not** taken time to prepare. **At other times**, we create plans **without** seriously seeking God.

(1) **Nehemiah does both**: he prays as though everything **depends** upon **God and** prepares as though he will be responsible to **obey**.

E. Are we asking God to open a door for which we have made no preparation?

Are our plans truly shaped by prayer, or are we asking God to bless decisions we have already made without Him? What practical step could we take now to prepare for the opportunity God may provide?

F. Nehemiah recognizes the true source of his success:

1. The king granted me what I asked, **for the good hand of my God was upon me**. The king **signs** the letters, **but God directs the outcome**.

2. **Nehemiah had a plan**, **but** his **confidence** was not in the excellence of his planning. His **confidence** was **in the gracious hand of God**.

V. Slide9a **3. FAITH EXAMINES THE BROKENNESS HONESTLY (9-16)**

A.9 Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen.

10 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

11 So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. (Babylon to Jer took 4 months, 900 m.)

12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. 13 I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. 15 Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did

not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

B. Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem with letters from the king and an armed escort.

1. His arrival immediately disturbs Sanballat and Tobiah because they do not want anyone seeking the welfare of Israel. Opposition appears before the rebuilding even begins.

C. After resting for 3 days, Nehemiah goes out at night with only a few men to inspect the walls. He does not announce his plans immediately or attempt to rally the entire city with emotional promises. Before he speaks publicly, he quietly examines the damage.

1. Nehemiah sees the ruins for himself. At one point, the rubble is so extensive that his animal cannot continue. The condition is even more severe than a distant report could communicate.

D. Wise leadership does not minimize reality. Nehemiah does not pretend that the damage is small or that the work will be easy. He studies the situation so that his response will be grounded in truth rather than assumption.

1. We often want to begin rebuilding before we have honestly faced what is broken. But restoration requires truth.

- a) A marriage cannot heal if the hurt is continually minimized. A church cannot address a weakness that no one is willing to name. A person cannot experience spiritual renewal while pretending that sin has done no real damage.

E. Have we taken an honest look at the broken places in our lives, or have we learned to live around the rubble? Is there a problem we keep minimizing because acknowledging its true condition would require change? Are we willing to listen and investigate before offering solutions?

F. Slide9b Faith is not pretending that the ruins do not exist. Faith looks directly at the ruins while believing that God is greater than what has been broken.

VI. Slide10 4. FAITH INVITES OTHERS INTO GOD'S WORK (17-18)

- A. 17 Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. **Come, let us build the wall** of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” 18 And I told them of **the hand of my God that had been upon me for good**, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “**Let us rise up and build.**” So they strengthened their hands for the good work.
- B. After inspecting the walls, Nehemiah gathers the people and says, “You see the trouble **we** are in.” He **does not** say, “You see the trouble **you** are in.”
1. Their trouble has become his trouble, and their mission will become his mission.
- C. Nehemiah clearly names the problem: Jerusalem lies in ruins, its gates have been burned, and the people are living in disgrace. But he does not stop with the problem. He calls them to action: “*Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem.*”
1. He then tells them about **the gracious hand of God** and **the words the king had spoken**. Nehemiah gives the people both an honest assessment of the need and a hopeful testimony of God’s provision.
- D. The people respond, “**Let us rise up and build.**” Nehemiah’s personal burden becomes *a shared mission*.
1. God’s work is rarely accomplished by one gifted or determined individual. Nehemiah may have received the initial burden, **but** the wall will require the participation of the entire community.
 2. **Faithful leaders** do not merely gather followers around themselves; they help people **recognize and participate** in what **God is doing**.
- E. When we speak about problems, do people leave feeling condemned, **or** do they see a hopeful path toward restoration? - Who might God be calling us to **encourage and invite** into **His** work?
- F. Nehemiah points them to the evidence that *God is already at work*.
1. The wall is still broken, **but** God’s hand is upon them. Their hope does not rest in the size of their **workforce**; it rests in the faithfulness of **their God**.

VII.Slide11 5. FAITH EXPECTS OPPOSITION BUT REMAINS CONFIDENT IN GOD (19-20)

- A. 19 But when **Sanballat** the Horonite and **Tobiah** the Ammonite servant and **Geshem** the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” 20 Then I replied to them, “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.”
- B. As soon as the people commit themselves to rebuilding, the **opposition** becomes more direct. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem mock them, despise them, and accuse them of rebelling against the king.
1. Opposition does not always mean that we have stepped outside God's will. Sometimes opposition increases precisely because we have begun obeying God.
- C. Nehemiah does not become distracted by defending his reputation. Nor does he place his ultimate confidence in the king's letters (I would have whipped them out here). He answers, “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build.”
1. Nehemiah knows who has called them, whose servants they are, and who will give them success.
 2. We should expect resistance whenever we take meaningful steps toward spiritual restoration. **Old habits** resist change. **Fear** tells us to stop. **Critics** question our motives. The enemy would rather see God's people accept the ruins *than rise up and rebuild*.
- D. Are we **interpreting resistance** as a reason to quit? Whose **approval matters most** in the work God has given us? When **opposition** comes, will our **confidence** rest in our resources, our reputation, **or the God of heaven**?
- E. **Faith** listens carefully to wise counsel, **but** it does not surrender God-given obedience to *mockery, intimidation, or fear*.

VIII.Slide12a CHRIST CONNECTION: JESUS ENTERED OUR RUINS

A. Nehemiah leaves the security of the royal court and travels to a ruined city because he cares about the welfare of God's people.

1. He identifies w/their trouble and leads them in the work of restoration. In this way, his actions give us a limited picture of a much greater Rescuer.

B. Jesus did not remain distant from our broken condition. He left the glory of heaven and entered a world ruined by sin.

1. Nehemiah could say, "You see the trouble we are in," but Jesus went even further: He took our guilt and judgment upon Himself.

C. Nehemiah faced ridicule and accusations while working to restore Jerusalem.

Jesus was mocked, falsely accused, rejected, and crucified in order to accomplish our redemption.

1. The gospel is not merely that Jesus helps us improve the damaged walls of our old lives. The gospel is that, through Christ, God forgives our sin, gives us new life, and makes us part of His new creation.

- a) Because Jesus rose from the dead, the Ruins do not get the final word. Sin does not get the final word. Failure does not get the final word. Death does not get the final word. Jesus does!

D. Conclusion: Rise up and build

E. Nehemiah 1 shows us a man who is willing to weep and pray.

Nehemiah 2 shows us that his prayers lead to preparation, courage, and action.

1. God opens the door, but Nehemiah must walk through it. God provides the resources, but Nehemiah must make the journey. God places His hand upon the work, but Nehemiah and the people must rise up & build.

F. Perhaps God has already shown us something that is broken. We have prayed about it, grieved over it, and asked God to intervene. Now the question may be whether we are willing to take the next faithful step.

G. What conversation do we need to have? What plan do we need to make? What truth do we need to face? Whom do we need to invite into the work? What act of obedience have we delayed because we are waiting for all our fear to disappear?

1. We do not move forward because the work will be easy. We move forward because **the good hand of our God is upon His people.** We do not rebuild to **earn** God's favor. In Christ, we **obey** because His favor has already been graciously given to us.

H. **Slide12b** Faith **prays**. Faith **waits**. Faith **plans**. Faith **examines**. Faith **invites**.
And when God *opens the door*, faith **ris**es and **acts**.

I. **Pray**: Lord, Help us face what is broken *honestly* and trust **You** when opposition comes.

J. Keywords: