

## **BUILD A PLAN TO BUILD YOUR LIFE**

Two weeks ago, we began a new series of messages through the book of Nehemiah called “Time to Build”. And it's a series to help you prepare and reenter life even as this COVID pandemic continues to sweep the world. But we know that God is in control, and he will put an end to this pandemic as he has done with other pandemics before in the history of the world.

So, covid will go away, or maybe linger just like the flu or common cold and in the midst of this I believe we have the opportunity of a lifetime to reset our lives, to rebuild our lives, renew, refresh, reenergize in a whole new way. And that's what this series is all about.

Now, there are five books in the Bible that specifically give us instructions for how to build a better future, after a time of captivity. And those books are Nehemiah, Ezra, Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi. They're all in the Old Testament. So, two weeks ago, I shared the first message in this series and the principles from the book of Nehemiah on how to build and rebuild your life. And all the principles I taught are on how to have a fresh start. I said that it means expressing your hurts to God. And then you fast so you could focus on God and then you ask God's help through prayer.

Then, last week, I talked about how to find strength as you rebuild your life. I mentioned that help and comfort comes from the Holy Spirit. We cannot be strong inside unless we have the Holy Spirit inside of us. And the only way we can have the Holy Spirit is by making Jesus our Lord and Savior.

Now, today, I'm going to share with you another element that goes into building a great life. And this element is found in the second chapter of Nehemiah, the first nine verses. This element is about building or making a plan. If you're going to build a great life, you got to have a plan for your life.

You have to have a life plan. You need to write down a simple plan and get starting and building a better future. Now it's not going to happen without a plan. If you don't have a plan for a better future in your life, you're just going to coast. And you can't coast into a better you, you can't drift into a better future. It takes intention and it takes planning.

In this chapter, Nehemiah gives us a very practical model for life planning. And that's why I'm calling this message, **"Build a Plan to Build Your Life"**.

Now, before I show you Nehemiah's seven step planning model for building a better life, let me first answer the question, Why should I make plans? Well, there are a lot of biblical reasons, but let me just mention three quickly. First, you need to plan your life because God makes plans. Now, Jeremiah 29:11 may be one of the most favorite verses of Christians. It says, ***"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."***

Now, listen, if God makes plans and he wants us to be like him, then we should make plans too. I hope you're planning for your future.

Number two, you ought to plan because God tells you to plan. All through Scripture, particularly in the book of Proverbs, the Bible talks about the value of planning your life. Proverbs 4:26a says this: ***"Give careful thought to the paths for your feet."*** What does that mean? Plan it. *Give careful thought.* That's another way of saying, "Build a plan. Make a plan".

In the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 14:40 says, ***"Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."*** What's he saying? God doesn't want your life to be a life of chaos. He tells you to plan.

And here's the third reason, so I don't waste my life. So, I don't waste my life. Planning is a matter of stewardship. Your life is God's gift to you. What you do with your life is your gift to God.

And the Bible says this in Ephesians 5: 15-16a, "*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity.*" You can't do that without a plan.

You say, "Okay, Rolly, I got it. I realize that if I'm going to build my life, despite covid, I'm going to have to make some God-inspired plans." How do you do that?

Well, that's what this message is about today. You just copy what Nehemiah did in chapter 2, the seven steps. When Nehemiah got a burden, when he got a vision, when he set up a plan, he did seven things in his plan. It's found in **Nehemiah 1:11-2:9.**

Now, again, the background. Nehemiah desperately wanted to return to his home, the land of Israel, and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. But he has a very important and actually a very comfortable cushy job, in Persia, serving in the Royal court of a King called Artaxerxes. He couldn't just offhandedly suggest to the King just let him go without a plan. So, he comes up with a plan and he gives us a model of **seven steps that you need for life planning** in your life.

Here's step one in developing a life plan. **Pray and ask for God's favor.** Pray and ask for God's favor on your life. God's favor is God's grace. This is the first thing that Nehemiah does in his life plan. Nehemiah 1:11, he says this, he prays, "*Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.*" Then, on a side note, he says, "*I was cupbearer to the king.*"

Now, that probably wasn't a very stressful job. I mean, you're just serving the King wine. But he was really stressed out. Why? Because he was carrying the burden of all Israelites. He had a burden of rebuilding Jerusalem, and he didn't know what to do.

There was a plan starting to build in his mind, but it seemed impossible. Me, a wine-server, approach the king about my burden? No way, Jose! It's impossible. But the Bible says, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." (Luke 18:27)

Okay? Now you may be thinking, "I have a very heavy burden. I have such an impossible dream, task, project, plan, vision. Who am I to even aspire such a thing? What am I going to do?" Well, you know what? You do what Nehemiah did. You can pray about it. You can pray and ask for God's favor. Do you know that God is eager to hear you ask from him? Do you realize that he wants to bless your life? Do you recognize the fact that he wants you to succeed in life? Just ask. Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matt. 7:7)

Now, here's the next step. Step two. Once you start praying and you ask God for his favor in your life, step two is this: **Prepare for an operation and then wait.** Okay? You say, "I think God wants me to do something about this problem in society." Or, "God wants me to do something about this problem in my company or in my home or in my community or in my church." You start preparing for an opportunity to do something. You don't just sit around, waiting for God to do something. You start preparing for that opportunity.

Now, the Bible says in Nehemiah 2:1, "*In the month of Nisan...*" That means, four months later after he had prayed his prayer. Now look. When you start praying for a vision, for a dream, for a goal, for a plan, it doesn't come instantly. It takes time. In the meantime, what was he doing during those four months? Preparing for the opportunity to ask the King, could he go do what God had called him to do.

Now, Nehemiah had gotten this burden four months earlier maybe much earlier than that, and for four months he's been waiting for something to happen, and now something happens. What had been happening during those four months? He'd been praying. But he also had been planning and he had also been preparing.

So, when God gives you a vision or a burden, don't expect it to happen right away. You have to wait. While waiting, you're also preparing and when opportunity knocks, you'll be ready to open the door. You see, all of life is full of opportunities. There are opportunities all around you. You're just overlooking them. Why? You're not praying. You're not preparing. You're not planning. A lot of times, we're just not ready for the opportunities and they pass us by and then they're gone. So, pray. Then, start preparing for the opportunity, and then wait for the opportunity to come. God will provide it at the right time.

Step three. **Expect fear but don't let it stop me.** This is the third thing we see in Nehemiah's plan. Expect fear but don't let it stop me. Nehemiah says in verse 1, "In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, 'Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.'" Then, Nehemiah says, "*I was very much afraid.*"

Now, an opportunity is presented before him. An opportunity to open up to the king about his burden because the King asked about his sadness. But he didn't recognize this opportunity at first. Instead, he became very afraid. He's literally scared to death. Why? Because in those days, it was a capital crime to be sad before the King. Kings were very fickle in those days, they didn't want any downers around them. They didn't want one anybody raining on their parade. If you frown in the presence of the King, you could get your head cut off. If you were depressed in the presence of the King, that was it.

Notice it says, "This is the first time I had ever appeared sad." He'd always been upbeat around his boss. It's a real gamble to show his true emotions. Not only that, Nehemiah is going to ask permission for leave of absence.

Now, in those days, if a King doesn't like your request, it means he doesn't like you. So, no wonder Nehemiah is frightened and on top of that he's going to ask permission to go rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. It seems to be a tall order because why would the King even care about Jerusalem. So, he's standing before a King who has the power of life and death. He's got a reason to be afraid.

Here's a principle. If you're going to be used by God, you're going to have to move ahead in spite of your fear. Courage is not the absence of fear, courage is moving ahead in spite of your fear. If you're not afraid, you don't need courage. You only have courage when you're scared to death and you do it anyway.

So, Nehemiah faced his fears and forged ahead. He unburdened himself before the king. He said, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" (2:3) Now, he didn't know how the king would react. He was exposing too much of his feelings to the king. He was becoming vulnerable, and the king might interpret it as a weakness and he could get his head cut off anyway. But he had to do it. He faced his fears.

Is there anything holding you back? Are you afraid to go forward because you might fail? Are you afraid of making a mistake? John Maxwell said, "The greatest mistake we make is living in constant fear that we will make one." Just go ahead then. Do what you think is the best thing to do and face your fears. Remember, you have prayed about it.

What happens next must be a total surprise to Nehemiah. In verse 4a, "The king said to me, 'What is it you want?'" He was so surprised and flabbergasted that he didn't know what to say.

Have you ever been in a situation like that where you are suddenly tongue-tied and you didn't know what to say, you didn't know how to react. Sometimes, in those kind of situations, when you're not careful, you might just bungle it and you make the situation worse. What do you then? Again, do what Nehemiah did. Pray. "Then I prayed to the God of heaven" (4b).

Now, this is the second time he prays. There are actually 11 prayers in the book of Nehemiah and here's the second one. What does it tell us? We keep on praying as we pursue our plans. He prays before he meets the King. He says, "God, give me this opportunity to present my plan." And then when the King says, "Hey, what's the problem with you?" He stops and he prays what I call a lightning prayer. It's really very short. "Help, God".

Sometimes prayer can just be one word, help. Now this isn't the four months of prayer he's already done. This is a quick prayer. It's the silent quick on-the-spot prayer. God give me the wisdom. Help me know what to say right now.

And that leads us to step four, establishing a life plan. Step four is this, **establish a clear target.** That's the next verse. Nehemiah 2:5. You establish a clear target. Nehemiah 2:5 says, "*and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it."*"

Now notice, Nehemiah gets very specific here. He says, "I want you to send me to my hometown." And he adds, "I want to rebuild the wall".

This is the next step in life planning. You set a goal. You got to have a target. You've all heard, if you aim at nothing, you're going to hit it. So, you ask yourself some simple questions. What do I want to be. What do I want to do? What do I want to have? These are the questions you have to ask in establishing a goal.

Now, let me tell you something. I've done a lot of goal-setting in my life and there are two common errors that people make in goal-setting.

We set them too low and we try to accomplish them too quickly. Most people set little, teeny tiny goals and then try to do them immediately. I want to challenge you to set a big goal, so big you're bound to fail unless God bails you out. But spend the rest of your life going after it. If that means becoming the next American Idol, go for it. Don't be afraid of dreaming big.

Inch by inch, anything's a cinch. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. You set big goals, you make big plans, so big that God has to bail you out. You let the size of your God determine the size of your goal. You see, God loves big planning. Why? It honors him. It honors God to be a big planner. It's what you're expecting God to do and it's saying, "God, I'm trusting you to help me to do this. This is what I want God to do in my life."

So, Nehemiah says, "Okay, I'll tell you what I want. I want to go rebuild a wall around the whole city of my hometown." Had he ever built a wall? No. Was he a builder? No, he's not like Kuya Julius or Kuya Andrew. He's a wine steward. And he's going to go home and do a rebuilding project for an entire city. He never built anything. He's a cupbearer, but he has a big goal. As I said, we set our goals too low, and we try to accomplish them too quickly.

So, your first step is to get the prayer behind you. Then you think it through and you prepare for the opportunity so that when God opens up the opportunities, you're ready for it. Then when that's there, you're ready to say what you need. People say, "Well, that guy has all the luck. He gets all the breaks." You know what I've found? The more I plan and the more I prepare the luckier I get. Okay, it's not about luck. It's about preparation. The opportunities are always there all around you. You just have to be ready for them. You got to see them. How will you see them? By praying, by preparing, by waiting, and then by establishing a goal.



And then you come to the next step. Step five in life planning is this, **set a deadline**. Set a deadline. Nehemiah 2:6, *“Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him asked me, ‘How long will your work take? And when will you get back?’ It pleased the king to send me; so, I set a time.”*

That's the next step. Step five is set a time, a deadline. A goal has to have a deadline. If your goal doesn't have a deadline, that's not a goal. This is the scheduling part of life planning. You know what you want to do, and then you know when you want to do it. You schedule it. You put it in your calendar, and you ask the question, "How long is it going to take?" "Probably longer than you think." In Nehemiah 5:14, it tells us Nehemiah actually came back to the Persian empire 12 years later because he was popular with this King.

Now, the King didn't want him to leave. And so, the King says, "How long are you going to be gone?" It showed that the King really did like Nehemiah.

So, maybe Nehemiah timed it this way, but God had a time in it and you have to have timing. Nehemiah establishes a deadline. He puts it on his calendar. Remember this, a dream without a deadline is just an empty wish. A dream without a deadline is just an empty wish. It won't go anywhere.

Now here's the sixth step in life planning, **anticipate the barriers**. Anticipate the barriers that I'll face. Nehemiah 2:7-8, he says, *“I also said to him, ‘If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?’ And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests”*.

He's already asked permission to go. Now he's asking for protection. And then he's asking for provision.

You see, it's about 800 to 1,000 miles journey between Iraq and Israel. And he's got to go through a lot of provinces. You didn't travel freely in those days, you had to go through proper procedures. You had to show your papers.

So he's already thought through what he's going to need. He's asked for permission. Now he's asking for protection. This implied that he thought it out. Remember, he's just been put on the spot. "What do you want?" He was afraid at first. He was tongue-tied but he prayed and God gave him courage and made him remember the things he already thought out.

It's a clear example of planning. He's not just praying. He's not just preparing during those four months, he's planning for the opportunity so he knows what to say about what he needs. So, the questions you want to ask yourself in your own planning, when you're anticipating problems, ask some stuff like this. What could hold me back? Why don't I have it already? What are the problems or potential problems? What are the barriers?

Now, listen. Some of you have dreams in your life that you want to get done. You've dreamed about it in your business, but you're not the CEO of your company. Maybe you're in middle management. And I want to say to you, the heart of the executive is in the hand of the Lord, and He can turn it whichever way He wishes. The company's president is in the hand of the Lord. You need to remember that. God is in the business of changing hearts. It's up to Him. He's sovereign. Okay? Don't tell me that other people won't let you do what God has called you to do. Just start believing and trusting and watch what happens.

Now, let me ask you, do you really want to grow spiritually? You know, the very fact that you're here, listening to this message means you want to grow. What plans have you made for that? What are your plans for this year? We plan everything else in our life, why don't we plan our spiritual growth? Do you have a plan to read through the Bible?

Do you have a plan to set aside a certain time every day for prayer? Do you have a plan to talk to that person at work about the Lord? Do you have a plan to get to know others and then invite them to church? Have you planned it or are you just hoping it'll happen someday?

Very few things happen spontaneously. You need to plan. A plan for Bible reading. A plan for witnessing. A plan for prayer. A plan for all the things that are important in your life. And the plans you have that you just think up and then ask God to bless, that's not what we're talking about. What we're talking about is not saying, "God, bless what I'm doing." Instead, you pray, "God, help me to do what you're blessing." What's your plan? If you're getting your plans from the Lord, they'll be big enough for him to fit in. That's how you know they're from God.

And the last step, number seven, is this, **trust God to meet all my needs.** Nehemiah 2:8c says this, Nehemiah says, "*And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.*"

You see, a mark of spiritual maturity is when you recognize that God's hand is behind the people who are helping you or may be delaying the project. "God was with me," he says. If Nehemiah hadn't prayed and hadn't planned, setting this thing up, nothing would have happened.

Now let me just close by applying this to your personal life. What would you like God to do in your life? In the next six months, in the next year, the next five years, what would you like to change? What do you want to be better in your future? We're talking about building a better life for you. It all starts with these seven principles. When God finds a person willing to do it His way, in His timing, based on His power, He will always provide the resources. I have found that to be true in my life for 40 years.

Today, I want you to build your life by building a plan.

But first, recognize that all your plans will be for nothing if you don't have Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You may be successful in this world, but what is success if you don't go to heaven? God wants you to be there. All you need to do is to believe that Jesus died for your sins, to forgive you of your sins. He planned it since the beginning of time. The Bible says we are all sinners condemned to die. But it also says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Also, it says in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."