

HOW TO WORK AS A TEAM

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Today we're in part five of a series I'm calling "Time to Build". You know, the pandemic has given us an opportunity for a fresh start in life and as we go into the future, it's an occasion to build a better future. Now, if you want to know God's way to build anything or rebuild anything, you're going to want to study the book of Nehemiah, which is the story of one of the greatest building projects in the history of humanity. It was completed in a record time of 52 days. How did they do it? That's the subject of my message this morning.

Years and years ago, I worked in New York and then I decided to leave the company I worked for. I was blessed to be part of a wonderful team. On my last day in the office, my teammates presented to me a picture frame which one of them created. It said, "We can't spell success without 'U'". That, of course, was touching. But it was every bit true for every individual, not just me, who was part of the team. Remember the old saying, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts". If everyone is doing their part, then it will be a wholesome and successful team indeed.

So, in our message this morning, I'd like to point out that to fulfill any dream God puts in your heart, you're going to have to enlist other people to help you. You can't do it yourself. You'll never reach your dream by yourself. God wired us to need each other. No one ever succeeds on their own.

Now, in the latter part of chapter 2, we see that Nehemiah recruits his fellow Israelites to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and they enthusiastically said, "Let us start rebuilding!" Well and good.

But once you've recruited some people to help you with your dream to build a better future, you also have to know how to get them to work together.

And that's a whole different issue. You might get some friends to help you with your dream, but will they know how to work together?

One of the reasons I believe the world is in such a bad shape these days, because people don't know how to work together anymore. They work against each other instead of working with each other. And so, as we look around in the world, we see the problems are just getting worse.

What we're going to look at today is a skill that you need. You need it to succeed in life. Business studies and home studies show that the number one factor in getting promoted in life is having good people skills. It's the number one factor, having good people skills. Being able to work to get other people to work together. In contrast, the number one reason people get fired is poor communication skills, poor people skills, not knowing how to get along with others. So, this is a message that you need to take notes on, not just for yourself, but to help other people going through a tough time.

So, this morning I'd like to share a message on **"How to Work as a Team"** based on Nehemiah 3. Please open your Bibles to Nehemiah 3 and follow along as I go through this passage this morning.

Now let's just review the background. The city of Jerusalem was a pile of ruins, destroyed by war and 70 years of neglect. Well, the Jews were held captive in Babylon. Then God gave Nehemiah the dream of rebuilding a protective wall around the city so it could flourish again. And I just want to say to you that as your pastor, my goal for you in this new year is that you will flourish, that you will flourish again after COVID 19.

Now, if you read Nehemiah chapter 3 without any understanding, it just looks like one of those chapters that you want to skip over because on the surface, it just looks like a boring list of hard-to-pronounce names and funny-sounding gates.

This guy built this part of the wall, this guy built this gate, and it just doesn't look like something that you're going to get a lot out of. But like in any passage of Scripture, if you dig below the surface, you find treasure.

Now, before we get into that, let me show you a **map of Jerusalem with the wall and the 10 gates that Nehemiah rebuilt.** This is what it looked like when it was all finished. All of these gates and the wall are mentioned in chapter 3. And he starts at **the north part of the town up there with the sheep gate.** See that in chapter 3 verse 1. And then he begins to go counterclockwise to the fish gate, the old gate, the valley gate, the dung gate, fountain gate, water gate – we have that here, too, in Washington, DC, right? -- the horse gate, east gate, and the inspection gate.

Now, I wish I had time to explain all those gates and why they were named like that, but I want to get right to the point. Jerusalem is built on a steep hill, actually several steep hills with deep valleys on either side. And in chapter 3, Nehemiah reports who built each part of the wall and who built each of the 10 different gates. Now, right now, you're probably thinking, "How in the world does this chapter relate to me today?" And again, as I said earlier, the answer is because beneath the surface of this chapter, God gives us an example, an amazing example of how to get people to work together.

If you're going to be a success in life, you're going to need other people's help, and you're going to need to know how to help people work together. Nehemiah, in this passage, models **six principles** -- yes, six principles -- you can apply to any dream that you have to build something or to rebuild something in your family, in your career, in your personal life, in your church, in your ministry, whatever. Now these six principles will affect whether the rest of your life is a success or a failure. So, I really want to encourage you to write this down or take a picture. Pen and paper manufacturers will go out of business one of these days. Let's get right into these six steps.

Number one, when God has given you a dream the first step to getting other people involved is to

1. **Divide the dream into smaller goals and tasks.** Divide the big dream that you're given into smaller goals and tasks. Nehemiah broke down a huge dream into manageable chunks. Now, if you notice, the word "Section" appears in this chapter 18 times in the NIV. In the Contemporary English Version, 39 times. In the ESV and NASB, 7 times. In the KJV, 0 time, and I was surprised by that. Anyway, the number of times it appears depends on the version. But my point is this. What is a section?

Well, a definition of section is a smaller part of a whole. Now, Nehemiah had to think through how he's going to take this big goal, build a wall all around Jerusalem and break it down into manageable chunks, into sections. That took some thinking. It took some planning. And it probably was during that midnight ride that we looked at a couple of weeks ago. So, that's the first step. You break the dream. You divide the dream into smaller goals and tasks.

Here's number two, you must

2. **Let others share ownership of the dream.** Your dream, if it's ever going to be accomplished, must become "our" dream. That's why I don't call this "my church". This is "our church". Now, I can always tell who consider themselves a part of our church by how they talk about our church. Simple attenders will walk up to me in a grocery store and they say, "Pastor, I love your church." But serious attenders and members will walk up to me and they say, "Pastor, I love our church." Get the difference? It's our, it's we.

Now, another key phrase that's used many times in Nehemiah 3 is a phrase about ownership like "his house" and "their house". Let me just give you a few examples.

Verse 10, “*Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house.*” Verse 17, “*Hashabiah built the wall in his own district.*” Verse 23, “*Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house.*” Verse 28, “*The priests made repairs, each in front of his own house.*” See that?

Here's the point. If you're going to have a dream and it's going to grow, you're going to have to share ownership. And you have to be strategic to motivate people. Here's the key: **Ownership increases motivation**. Now, in this case, people began to build the part of the wall in front of their own house. So, I imagine people were motivated to really work hard and put their best efforts because they're protecting their own houses and families. Nehemiah is a really good planner and strategist.

Number three, here's the third principle:

3. **Organize around natural relationships**. If you have a dream and you're going to get other people to help you with your dream, you need to create work groups that use relationships that already exist. For instance, in verse 1 of this chapter, we see a ministry-based work group. In other words, people were working on a project together because they share the same ministry. The Bible says there in verse 1, “*Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate.*”

The sheep gate is where the sheep came in, the sheep that they were going to sacrifice at the temple. So, Nehemiah got the priests rebuilding the gate that affects the temple the most. It's a ministry-based group.

In verse 2, we see a geography-based work group. It says, “*The men of Jericho built the adjoining section.*” It says that these guys are all from the same city. They already had a community connection.

So, it's a geography-based group.

In verse 3, we have a family-based work group. It says, "*The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah.*" And what are the sons of Hassenaah? They're brothers. They're related. They're family.

In Verse 12, we see another family-based work group: "*Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.*" Now in ancient Hebrew culture, women weren't honored like this. So, Nehemiah has given credit to where credit's due. These daughters built their part of the wall fronting their house.

In verse 32, we see a career-based work group. It says, "*and between the room above the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and merchants made repairs.*" So, you've got craftsmen, you've got retailers. These are people being grouped by professions.

Now, why am I pointing this out? Because at Fil-Am Church, we do the exact same thing. We have small groups based on each of these categories. We have groups that are based around common interests or location or age groups. Like our home groups, our youth group, our young adults group, our Sunday school for children group, our missions group, our music ministry group, and so on.

It's interesting that in this chapter, there are no professional builders mentioned in the building of the wall around Jerusalem. Everybody was a volunteer. Everybody was an amateur. Everybody had another career. But everybody is building the wall, working on the dream together without being paid. They're all volunteers. So, we divide the dream into smaller goals and tasks. We let other people share ownership of the dream. We organize around natural relationships.

And then number four,

4. **Develop a team spirit.** If you're going to reach your dream, you're going to have to get your friends or the people who are working with you, whether it's two or five or 10 or whatever, you're going to have to develop a team spirit. What does that mean? You focus on cooperation, not competition. Emphasize what we're doing is something we're doing together. It's a teamwork. You cultivate community. This is the fourth key. You develop a team spirit on your dream team. How do you do that? By getting them to pay attention to those working alongside them.

Do you know how to do that? Do you know how to get other people to work together with a team spirit? It's a skill that you need. He helped people feel a part of something bigger than themselves, than just their own individual efforts. He said, "Look on either side of you." And he's saying, "We've got this thing. We're doing this together." That's why two key phrases appear in this chapter over and over, these are the phrases "next to him" and "next to them". Nehemiah's saying, "Look to your right, look to your left, and you'll just see who's serving next to you. Realize you're not alone. We're a team."

1 Corinthians 3:9 says this: **"For we are co-workers in God's service..."** In the body of Christ there is no place for prima donnas. We develop a team spirit. I want you to take note of this. This is really important because it's a reason a lot of people fail. God's work is always done in partnership. Paul never did any of his ministry alone. He never went after any dream alone. He always took a team with him. Jesus' entire ministry was done with a small group of 12 people. When Jesus started his ministry, first thing he did is build a small group. If you're not in a small group, who's helping you with your dream? Who's encouraging you?

You know, there are 59 "one anothers" in the New Testament. That phrase, one another, is used 59 times.

The Bible says we're to love one another, we're to care for one another, we're to serve one another, we're to help one another, we're to pray for one another, we're to bear one another's burdens, on and on. What is that? That's this principle of developing a team spirit. That's why our name is not just Fil-Am Church. It's Fil-Am Community Church. We believe in community. We believe in unity. We believe in team spirit.

Philippians 1:27 says this: *"Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News."*

That's what Nehemiah's saying. Everybody standing together and fighting together for the faith.

Number five, here's the fifth principle we extract from the treasure of Nehemiah 3. When you're getting ready to build your dream, here's what you do.

5. **Love everyone but invest in the willing.** Love everyone but invest in the willing. Now, this is the strategy of Jesus. Jesus loved everybody. There was no person that Jesus didn't love. He loved everybody. He fed the 5,000. He preached to the crowd, but he trained the 70 and he disciplined 12 and he mentored three. He loves everybody, but he spends the maximum amount of time with those who bear the maximum responsibility.

The Bible tells us that only Peter, James, and John got to go up on the Mount of Transfiguration. Only Peter, James, and John were brought into the Garden of Gethsemane a little bit further to pray with him. Was Jesus playing favorites? Yes. He was investing the maximum amount of time with those who would bear the maximum responsibility. And later in the book of Galatians, Paul calls Peter, James, and John, the pillars of the church. So, you love everybody, but you invest your life in the willing, those who want to help in the dream.

Now, listen. Not everyone is going to want to be part of your God-given dream. Don't worry about that. Don't fret about it. Not everybody's going to be a part of your God-given dream. That's okay. Nehemiah wasn't discouraged by those who would not help. In fact, in this chapter, he just barely mentions their reluctance and he then keeps on focusing on those who did want to be a part. That's in verse 5 of this chapter. This verse tells us, the next section of the wall was rebuilt by the men of Tekoa. That's the good news. But it says, *“their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.”* That's all he says about them. The noble men of that town refused to work or help. We don't know why they didn't want to help. I think it reveals Nehemiah's leadership character that he doesn't elaborate. He doesn't speculate. He doesn't guess about their motivation.

Here's the truth. You don't know your own motivation much of the time. So why do you think you assume that you can know the motivation of others? You don't. I don't know my own motivation a lot of times. I have so many mixed motivations and you do too. And if you can't figure out your own reasons why you do what you do, how in the world makes you think you're an authority than anybody else? So, you love everybody, but you invest in the willing. You don't get upset by people who don't want to help.

Remember, even Jesus, who by the way, remember, was perfect, had a defector named Judas, who bailed out on him and caused enormous damage. But Jesus kept his focus on the 11 faithful guys, not the one unfaithful. You're going to have people in your life who betray you, let you down, disappoint you, but you don't keep your eyes on them. You keep your eyes on the people who work with you hand in hand, who are serving as a team spirit. And you love everybody. You keep your heart clean. You don't get bitter, but you invest in the willing.

Romans 14:10 and 12 says this: ***"You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before***

God's judgment seat... So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God." So he says, "Stop judging each other. God is God and I'm not."

Now, Nehemiah models one more secret of getting people to work together. And I want you to write this down or take a picture.

6. **Always appreciate people.**

Do you know that when you appreciate people, you actually raise their value? If you've ever bought a home in Northern Virginia, you know the value of appreciation. It goes up in value. If you've ever bought a car, you know the meaning of depreciation. It goes down in value. Do you realize that every time you appreciate people, you raise their value? When you appreciate your kids, you raise their value. When you appreciate your spouse, you raise their value. When you appreciate a coworker, you raise their value.

In Ephesians 1:16, Paul says this: *"I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."* That's a leader. Now, what does God want you to appreciate in other people? Well, Nehemiah models it in this chapter and he gives us four things that we need to be more appreciative about the people in our lives.

First, the first thing to appreciate is this, **recognize individuals by name**, recognize individuals by name. When you see something being done and you think that's a good thing, don't just say, "I want to thank everybody who helped." Be specific. I think it's amazing that Nehemiah in this chapter singles out 71 individuals. There are 71 Hebrew names in 32 verses and he singles out 71 people for special appreciation. He doesn't only honor the people who are building the wall. He actually honors their parents. He said, this guy built this part of the wall. His dad was so-and-so. You see, parents love to be proud of their kids. Nehemiah knows that. So, recognize individuals. Call them by name. The sweetest thing people like to hear is their own name. Don't just say, "I want to thank all of you." Get specific. Identify specific people in your life who make a difference.

Number two, recognize not just specific individuals, but **recognize specific work**. Don't just say after a project, "Well, you all did a good job." Don't just say that at work or in your ministry or in your small group or wherever. Don't just say "You all did a good job." Point out the details. There are many, many examples of this in Nehemiah chapter 3. Let me just give you one, verse 6. He talks about a group. He said they laid the beams and they put the doors and the bolts and the bars in place. That's pretty specific. So don't just say, "I'm proud of you." Say, "I'm proud of you for doing this, this, this, and this." Recognize specific individuals and recognize specific work.

Number three, **recognize great attitude**. When you see great attitude anywhere around you in a world that has bad attitude most of the time, you're going to excel in helping people become who God wants them to be. And you're going to have more people helping you with the vision God gives you. Recognize great attitude. In this chapter, Nehemiah singles out one man for his enthusiasm and his passion. In verse 20, Nehemiah 3:20, it says this: "*Ba'ruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section.*"

Now, he doesn't say that about anybody else. He says, this guy repaired this and she repaired that. But this one guy, Baruch, zealously repaired another section. It says, he's doing it with enthusiasm. He's doing it with passion. You want to recognize great attitude. Who is it around you has a great attitude? And you just need to say, "You know, I appreciate that. By the way, let me just give you a personal tip."

And then number four, **recognize extra effort**. When people go the second mile, when people do more than expected, you have people like this in your life. Recognize extra effort. In chapter 3 verse 4 and verse 21, there's one guy who gets mentioned twice. He gets mentioned twice in chapter 3. His name was Meremoth. I don't know what that name means, but Meremoth was his name.

Meremoth repaired, in verse 4, the section by the fish gate. By the way, that's where fishermen came in and sold the fish. It was the fish market there. Then, in verse 21, it says that Meremoth helped in repairing another gate which was the Fountain gate. So he didn't just finish one section, he finished two. He's going the second mile.

Now, let me wrap this up. This chapter talks about three kinds of work. No work, some work, and enthusiastic work. No work, some work, and enthusiastic work. I want to ask you two questions. I want you to think about these. First, God notices all three kinds of work: no work, some work, enthusiastic work -- let me end with these two questions. Which phrase describes your involvement in God's work? Let's just get right down to it. Right now, which phrase describes your involvement in God's work? No work, some work, or enthusiastic work?

Let me ask you another question. Which section of the wall are you building at Fil-Am? Which section of the wall are you building in your own family? Now, literally, God hasn't asked you to build a wall, but he does expect you to be involved in his work on earth. A lot of the work that you and I do throughout our lives is really pretty pointless. A lot of work on earth is really useless in the long haul. A lot of work that people do is really worthless in light of eternity, but God's Word promises this in 1 Corinthians 15:58, "*Brothers and sisters...always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord...*" Always give yourself fully. That means zealously, enthusiastically, passionately. "*... give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*" That makes working for God different than every other kind of work. It's never wasted. You say, "Well, nobody even sees what I'm doing." Doesn't matter. Others may not see what you're doing, but God does.

I hope you'll take these six principles on how to get people to work together. What our world needs today is people who do the exact opposite culture.

Right now, people work against each other. Bridge builders, people who create harmony, people who teach others how to work together, they are rare. And the Bible says that if you do that, it brings glory to God. What honors God the most is when we work together, standing shoulder to shoulder and we get along. It's our greatest witness to the world.