

What We Need is an Extreme Makeover! #2

(The second of 3 Messages from Nehemiah)

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Editor's note: The series "Extreme Makeover" was first delivered at a conference of Pastors and Ministry Leaders, hence some of the specific directives to the group assembled. The *core message*, however, is totally applicable to every member of the Body of Christ and therefore appears here on the Website. May you read with an open heart, asking God how this should affect you where you are. jzv

There is no one, who is being earnest and honest, that wouldn't admit the need for an Extreme Makeover in the Church today. Would you agree with that or can you possibly believe you're there already? That you have arrived at godly perfection? Well, you're still here on this planet – that's proof positive you too still need some changes to be made! ☺

Here's one particularly exciting facet about the Word of God: It is inexhaustible! There are so many different ways we could preach from the Book of Nehemiah. We all can re-visit scriptures that have just been exegeted with great anointing and yet can find something more (new, fresh) that *we've* never seen before! Only God can have that kind of input of meaning, His Word appealing to every believer at every level of spiritual maturity – there is something nourishing for each one of us. When Jesus taught, little children loved Him and at the same time, doctors and scholars were astounded. *That* is the Word of God! It's not merely the skill of the presenter; it's the *Life* that comes from the Word of God Itself.

We have been looking at this marvelous Book, reminding ourselves that Nehemiah is from an awesome background. His father, Hachaliah, knew how to *wait on God* and receive *enlightenment from God*. I really believe that we, the Church today, are on the brink of a fresh enlightening. That doesn't necessarily mean a word you've never heard before. We say (almost demand), "I want to hear '*new truth*.'" I've heard this all my life. I want to hear something 'new.'" Now, "new" can be something you finally understand! ☺ It's like something you suddenly comprehend or grasp its significance. It's a fresh revelation *to you* that causes you to proclaim: "Alright! I get it! I can embrace that!"

I really believe that the Body of Christ is right on the pinnacle, right on the very edge, of having new expressions come forth from God. Especially, I think leaders who are students of the Bible, are going to begin to see things they haven't really perceived before. The time is coming soon when fresh revelation is about to burst forth! They may have spoken the words before as Bible-truth, giving mental or academic assent or lip-service to a thought or concept, but have not truly *perceived* them. **Revelation is going to precede the return of Jesus Christ!**

Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day, "You can tell so many things – you can see the signs (or signals) in the natural – but you don't really understand what's happening in the spiritual realm" (see Mt.16:1-3). If we would just open our spiritual eyes, we could discern the signs. It should upset us when we turn on the news. Every time we look at a newscast and watch the horror that is in our streets, it should upset us. It should not *defeat* us! But it should *upset* the norm. Things are no longer "normal" – or "as usual." Things in Israel are not "as usual." We're no longer doing business "as usual." So, if you're doing "business as usual" in your church, you're boring! ☺ because we just can't do it (anything) the same old way anymore. If you're looking for books on "How to" – there are scads of them! – vast spiritual libraries filled with "how to do this" and "how to do that" and "how to do the other thing." How many of you know how frustrating it is to have done all the prescribed "do-s" and it just hasn't worked? But *this* is a new day! I'm telling you, it's a new moment in history! We just have to be willing to see it.

Nehemiah, in the palace of Shushan (Chap.1), is one who asked the brothers who came to visit him from Jerusalem, "*How are things back home? How are things now that the exile has ended? How is it with the ones who have returned to the Promised Land?*" And the report given to him was extremely negative.

That is so parallel with the way things are today! If I would say to you, “How do you see things in society right now? How are things really going where you live? How do you think things are in our beloved United States? How do you think things are going in the world?” there isn’t one of us that would say, “Oh, things are great! Couldn’t be better!” On the contrary, we have to admit, “They are not really very good right now. There have been some *walls* that have been torn down – they’re barely half up. Things just aren’t very good.”

But, that is not the end of the story. Hallelujah! If we think it is, or if we simply expect God to do everything on our behalf – things we actually are capable of doing for ourselves – we’re mistaken. You see, God will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He will **enable** us to do things that are beyond us, but He isn’t going to do what we want just because we say, “in Jesus’ Name.” That is not a spiritual magic wand! “Lord, I ask You to do this – in Jesus’ Name.” If we’d listen more carefully, we’d hear Him say, “That’s a great plan. Where do you think you got the idea? ☺ **I am imparting,**” says God, **“into you, the creative nature of My Being.”**

We sing the songs and have been: “I was created to praise. I was created to worship. I was created to give myself back to You.” Well, now we need to fulfill the purpose of our creation.

Nehemiah heard the report of their situation and was greatly distressed. It’s interesting what *our* response is to the stresses of conditions in our world. Our response is to converse about it – not with God but with one another! “My, my, my. Things are just... so... I’ll tell you, you just have to wonder how much worse it can get!” Instead of being *moved* by the Holy Spirit within and motivated, we... Well, why do you think He filled you with His Spirit? So you could say, “Shon-da-makai?” ☺ Or, is there... could there be... a higher purpose?

We are always trying to “pray the Holy Spirit down.” Down from where? He must really get weary of us! ☺ He already came down (see Jn.20:21,22; Ac.2:1-4) – He’s inside you (1Jn.2:24-28) – and instead of recognizing His presence and allowing His Lordship to arise – we’re always trying to pray Him back down!

Many years ago, I’d pray: “Oh, Lord, come. Come, Lord, come!” At some point, I heard Him clearly say: “I already did!” ☺ That just shocked me! I thought, “Oh, You mean I can’t pray for You to come down?” He said, “Why don’t you *allow* Me to rise up from within?” Oh, my Friends. If you could only hear this truth! If we could understand or learn how to exert or release the power that is in just one room filled with believers – you have no idea what we could accomplish! I honestly mean that! *The Holy Spirit is without limit* – except for us!

And Nehemiah began to weep. He cared so deeply, he wept over the report. And then he prayed. “*The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hacaliah... I asked the Lord, O Lord God of heaven (1:5) the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and obey His commands, let Your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear...*” We sing it: “Is it true that You are mindful of me? That You hear me, when I call?” Nehemiah is saying the same thing – or, we’re singing what was in his heart.

“*Let Your ears be attentive and Your eyes open, verse 6, to hear the prayer Your servant is praying before You, day and night, for Your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against You.*” That would preach by itself – just that much. It’s not “them” and “you.” It’s “we” and “us.” Nehemiah identifies with them.

“*Lord, WE have sinned. We have acted very wickedly toward You. We have not obeyed Your commands, decrees and laws that You gave Your servant Moses. Remember, Lord, the instruction You...*” When we say, “Lord, remember...” what are we really doing? We are putting stones of remembrance in the middle of the Jordan River (see Josh.4). We are reminding **us!** He has not forgotten!

“Lord, remember the instruction you gave Your servant Moses, saying,” verse 8, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to Me and obey My commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for My Name.” Nehemiah is praying God’s own Word. “They are Your servants and Your people, whom You redeemed by Your great strength and Your mighty hand. O 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....”

Every leader, every believer, needs to say that right now. “Give Your servant success!” Oh, Lord, give Your servants success.

Let’s look for a moment at Titus 1, verses 1 and 2. “I Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” Whew! That alone is a mouth full! Remember – look for the “little” treasures in His Word. Notice here in Titus the order Paul uses. We learn so much simply by reading more slowly. “I Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” I do not mean to diminish the 5-fold ministry offices in the Church by pointing this out. We need them all, but God had to come in through the backdoor with this “revival” of the *office of apostle* because denominations have tried to vote it out! Apostle – prophet – evangelist – pastor – teacher – the five-fold ministry (Eph.4:11).

It takes this 5-fold ministry to bring *maturity* to the Body of Christ (Eph.4:12-13). We need them – all five of them. We really have no vote about the matter, but we have tried to veto some of them in a lot of denominations. They labeled it “Old Testament.” So, this is the New Testament we’re reading in Titus. Because we didn’t *believe* in *apostles* we’ve had little or no order in the Church.

Following the revival of recognizing apostles, the Church went to another extreme when we started recognizing the *prophets*. Many people stopped praying for themselves and began a practice of seeking out the prophets for personal direction. As a result, many of these prophets stopped wearing garments of humility and put on crowns! And they became – clairvoyant! Then the Church split over that because there were so many *false prophecies* that were not being fulfilled. Hello?

Remember this – if you forget a lot of other things you read here, remember this: *one of the usual tactics of the enemy is, if he can’t talk you out of something, he will escalate it until you overdose and end up despising it!* (see 1Thes.5:20).

I’m old enough to remember going through what we’re now coming back to once again. ☺ The apostolic mantle DID come to the Church in my lifetime already. And it was a very powerful time. But then these apostles became known by their glowing reputations – and they vaunted, or boasted – and strutted their authority, but were *without God’s anointing*. ***Nothing is more dangerous than un-anointed authority in the Church!***

Also, in my own lifetime, we had prophets – who rose and fell. And then evangelists came on the scene. Oh, my! Did we go through the evangelists! They became our heroes. They would come into our dead churches and light the fire! Of course, we didn’t bother to check out which fire... ☺ Everyone would jump up and down, and whoop, and holler, and so on. It wasn’t that so many souls were being saved in these meetings; it was just there was so much excitement. And they grew very wealthy – very lifted up in pride – very choosy about where they would go. Are you okay hearing the truth? We must face our past failures and see the hand of the enemy in all of that, in the excesses, in the pride, in how easy it was for “spiritual” people to fall under the influence of – ego.

Do you know why I so pointedly tell these things? Because I think I’m the only one that will! ☺ You may THINK them, but not many people speak about the past failures of the Church. My brother Judson used to say to me, “Sis, *you* tell it.” ☺

Regardless of what man has done in the past to bring shame into the Church, do not despise the 5-fold ministry – we need it, but we don't need them heralded or exalted one at a time! We need them altogether, functioning as God designed.

The cloud that preceded the rain was the size of a man's hand. "I see a little cloud! It's the size of a man's hand!" (1Kgs.18:44). Elijah says, "That's big enough!" Look at your own hand – you have five fingers on a single hand. One hand, all the fingers working together. That is by divine design and that is how your hand operates most effectively and efficiently.

If we can get the **5-fold** ministry to operate – all at once Are you there? Can you grasp this illustration? Look at your hand. How well does it function without the thumb? If we can get all five offices to function together in the Church, they'll bring the rain of Revival – the rain of refreshing – the rain of harvest. There will be the reaper overtaking the sower (Amos 9:13). It will happen, Church, there's no question about that! The only question is, "When?" And that's the part we affect.

Continue reading in Titus from the King James Version, 1:1,2: "*I Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness in hope of eternal life which God [listen!] which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began.*"

Now this time, let's read the same passage from The Message paraphrase: "*I, Paul, am God's slave and Christ's agent for promoting the faith among God's chosen people, getting out the accurate word on God and how to respond rightly to it.*" "...rightly respond to it" – Don't you love that? That's your calling. Paul continues, "*My aim is to raise hopes by pointing the way to life without end. This is the life God promised long ago – and he doesn't break promises.*"

Comparing various translations will always enlarge your comprehension. From the Amplified Bible – undoubtedly influenced by a woman because it's so wordy! ☺ [You know, if you read through the Bible and select the Amplified, credit yourself for twice! ☺] Here is Titus 1 once again: "*I, Paul, a bond servant of God and an apostle (a special messenger) of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to stimulate and promote the faith of God's chosen ones and lead them on to accurate discernment and recognition of and acquaintance with the Truth which belongs to and harmonizes with and tends to godliness, 2(Resting) in the hope of eternal life, [life] which the ever-truthful God Who cannot deceive, promised before the world of the ages of time began.*"

That's the God we serve! That's the God to Whom we pray! When we truly come to that recognition, that understanding, we'll come back to fervent prayer! "*The effectual fervent prayer*" (Jas.5:16b) is one that rests in, and relies on, Who God is. It is the prayer of one that knows Who God really is! It isn't a matter of haphazardly throwing something up in the air toward heaven – "Hey God, *if* You don't mind doing this... Listen, *if* You're busy, it's okay, but..." That's the way I hear so many people pray. "Dear Lord, *if* You will bless this..."

IF?? Is there no promise in The Book that He will? Is there no promise that "*He who called you will accomplish what He called you to do*" (see Phil.1:6)? You don't have any promise? If you truly have the promise – you can't have the question mark! No "ifs!" We've just read it – 3 times! "*God who cannot lie!*" "*God, who doesn't break promises!*" "*God, who cannot deceive.*"

Pastors, do you remember the first time you graduated from Bible School or Seminary? You walked up and received the degree or diploma or "right to preach" or whatever it was you were given? Can you also remember the sense within you that was screaming, "Oh, let me at them! Hallelujah! I am going to be a success!" Remember those days? Remember when you were excited about visiting the missionaries and encouraging them? And when you were first excited about winning, as we call it, "winning the lost?" Where did all that excitement and enthusiasm go? "*I am the Lord thy God, I change not!*" (Mal.3:6).

Sir, Lady – whatever He has promised you... I don't know about you but I rely on the promises of God!
A promise is as true as the promise-er! And He is true!

There's probably no one these days who does not actually expect to be lied to – especially when we shop. We have an expectation to be deceived or have the data skewed in a certain way – and that's just lying. “How long will this last?” ☺ You know what I'm saying. We know that in order to sell the product, they're going to enlarge it – increase – magnify – exaggerate – and, in the church, we call that “evangelastically speaking.” ☺

Many years ago, the first time I ministered in the South, I was in Charleston SC. We had a few hours of leisure time and the people hosting me said, “Have you ever been to the slave markets? I said, “I don't even know what that is.” I grew up on the West Coast and was unfamiliar with their regional history. So, off we went to a place that has been maintained as an historical landmark. My hosts explained: “The auctioneer used to stand here; then the slave was placed there on that block – for all to view. The people were over there bidding on this... this person.” Being born and raised in the West, it was the furthest thing from my comprehension how one human being could purchase another human being from a third human being. I couldn't make any sense of it.

While they were relating all the facts to me, my mind faded into “thought vision.” Do you know what that is? It's hard to describe, but my mind took a little bunny trail and imagined or pictured another scene. I call that “thought vision.” I saw, as it were, myself as the auctioneer. Jesus was on the auction block and the congregation was where the buyers stood deciding whether or not to buy “it.”

As the auctioneer, I was making all sorts of promises as I “hawked” Jesus: “Ladies and Gentlemen! If you'll just take Him home with you, He'll fix your marriage; He'll heal you; He'll do this and that and the other. You'll be rich – just name it.” Then I said to Him, “Turn around, Jesus.” And He just obediently turned around on the block. Suddenly, I was hastened back to 20th century reality, so emotionally impacted by what I “saw” I literally was reduced to a shamble of tears. I had to request to be returned to my hotel.

When I burst inside the door of my room, I fell on my face right on that filthy carpet. ☺ I cried out, “God! Forgive me! I have no right to promise anyone a utopia, a perfect place free of problems or pain. I only have a right (and mandate) to present You!” There are so many hurting people today because ministers unconditionally promised, if they did this that would happen. So they did “this” and “that” never happened. And that situation left them empty and disillusioned and angry at God.

I have to have a little help up and down the steps right now because a while ago I had knee surgery. Since that time, I've been prayed for by the best! ☺ I mean, “big names” – recognized evangelists with healing ministries. They all have prayed for a miraculous healing and that the pain would go away, but it has not disappeared. There's never a moment of the day or night that I'm not conscious of that injured knee, even though the damage itself was properly repaired by the surgeon.

Now, I'm a great woman of God! ☺ A woman of faith! You'd think God would pay attention to my wonderful reputation, wouldn't you? ☺ If I asked Him, “Do You know who I am?” He would say, “I sure do and you need a little – ‘thorn in the flesh!’ (2Cor.12:7). It will keep you leaning on Me!”

Aw, Church, in great pain, I have prayed for other people, many who've been healed. And I know that is true of many of you! Don't try to explain that away. Through the years, I've had some days when I could barely meet my regular bills from month to month. I have been given paltry offerings, where they had promised me great things if I would just come, but then barely covered my actual expenses to get there. “Okay, God, they promised me!” And I'd honestly put forth every effort I could into ministering there, and couldn't pay my own bills when I returned home. Are you okay? Truth is truth and we need to hear it. Then I'd be so mad at – **God!** And He would say to me, “Read the *whole* story!”

We must remember the whole Word of God, but also consider this, my Friends: every time we read God's Word, it is *filtered* through our conscious minds. And that filtering process is based on our own past experiences and future hope – rarely on today's situation. That's why we have to say, "Holy Spirit, *enlighten* me. Rise up! I wait upon you! Show me where I am right now! Show me what I need to see! I don't fully understand everything."

When I was younger, I had full understanding. At least I thought I did. ☺ But I don't have all those pat answers anymore. I've lived long enough to be able to admit, "I don't know everything." I think Paul could admit that too. He said, "There's a lot of things back there I don't get – but *this one thing I know!*" (see 2Tim.1:12). So must come to this: we need that extreme makeover in our thought processes. We need a makeover in our preaching. We may have to burn a few old sermons! ☺ That's okay, *it's a new day!* It's time for us to shape up and sharpen up.

Nehemiah says, "*Lord, I'm claiming what You already promised.*" That's good! I grew up with a "Promise Box" on the kitchen table – until the Charismatic Movement came along and so many of the teachers taught against them. ☺ But I still like them, even today. Sometimes, we just need to be reminded of the existence of the promises of God. You'd reach into the box, take hold of that little promise card, and read it like God just sent you a personal special delivery letter. Have you ever done that? Of course the truth is the verses are not set in their contexts and the conditions to fulfillment of the promises are ignored ☺ – but they're His Word and those little cards still beat fortune cookies! ☺ We need to be reminded from time to time – one way or another – of the Promises of God.

"*Then I prayed to the God of heaven*" (Neh.1:4) – *and then I answered the king* (2:3). Nehemiah is the cup-bearer to the king (1:11) and he is in a state of grief over the news he has received. A cup-bearer never wants to show grief because it may look like someone slipped him something trying to get something bad into the king's drink. So, the king is always looking at his cup-bearer's face when the wine is brought to him. "Are you happy? Are things good? Have you tasted this? And you're not sick?"

So, Nehemiah comes into the king's presence. He can't hide the dark circles or puffy eyes from weeping, and he blindly says, "Here, O king, is your wine." And the king says, "What's going on with you?" (2:2). Nehemiah reports for us, "*so I prayed to the God of heaven.*" Smart move! Our first counsel should come from our God.

Today there is a war going on that too many of us as leaders do not recognize as a war. Just try and move your church to a new building and you'll understand the war that starts. There is resistance, whether it's the Planning and Zoning Committee in your community government or your own Governing Board (who all too often hold those same kind of meetings! ☺). **Suggested change causes things to erupt in the midst of people without vision.**

When a pastor announces, "Well, I believe God has spoken to me and..." that can be a most frightening thing for a church to hear! "What if we don't like it? Whose idea was this?" They respond that way because sufficient trust has not been cultivated already (by the leaders – us!) for the people to be able to believe we really *have* heard from God! *We* have to create that atmosphere of trust with our people. It is vital. We need to earn their trust. Do you know how to do that? Transparency. Be real. Be who you are. Be the leader God has positioned you to be. And don't hide all of your own shortfall – allow them to see your clay feet.

Recently, I heard a man being honest and transparent with his congregation. It was beautiful! I would have written "humble" across his back. He stood up there and admitted, "One of the things I have to watch is – I'm an ego-maniac." ☺ Okay, I recall he worded it a little differently! ☺ But he was being transparent. Following that kind of honesty, I would have believed almost anything he told me! There was something real that came forth. But, you see, if we aren't willing to admit and say, "I missed God," we'll never go anywhere because our spiritual vehicle doesn't have a reverse gear! ☺

We may feel like we need to shift into reverse and back up, but we just told the whole congregation, “This is what God has said!” Then all of a sudden, God says to us, like He did through Nathan the prophet, “I didn’t tell you to build it!” (2Sam.7). Instead of saying nothing, we need to be able to confess: “Ooops! I really thought I had heard from God, Church, but now, I really have!” ☺ Don’t be fearful of putting your foot on the clutch and shifting into another gear! Slow down or turn around. Be honest and say, “We’ll get there, but this is not exactly the time. We need to re-focus on God’s specific directions for today.”

When you’re facing a situation of impossibility, it’s a good plan to do what Nehemiah did. “*Oh, I said, Lord, the king’s asking me*” (2:4). We know God has the answer we need and a divine plan for us, so we ought to inquire of God first. Nehemiah said, “*If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so I can rebuild it*” (vs.5). “*Then the king, and the queen sitting beside him, asked me, ‘How long will your journey take and when will you get back?’*” (vs.6).

I wonder if we could answer anything that explicitly? “How long do you think it will take us, Pastor, to accomplish what God directs...” How long? Wouldn’t it be a wonderful thing if we could say, “It isn’t going to be long because when the **Lord** finally gets His plan through to us, when He gets it across to us, and we begin to walk in obedience, we’re on the road home.” Instead of prefacing it all with: “This is going to be a looonnng war!” I think we do that to our people in the Church. We don’t mean to do it, but subconsciously we teach them just to survive. “Just stay in the war – you don’t have to win.” I’m tired of just staying in the war! I’m ready to win!! I want to take some territory!

I cannot remember that there’s ever been a time more than today, when more ministers have shared with me, either in person or by email or telephone, the incredible negatives they are encountering – the harassment, the frustrations – that the enemy is sending their way. The opposition is huge! And, it is real! That is good news if we have eyes to see it that way! ☺ The enemy truly is upset because finally, we have an idea from God that we really can make a difference! We really can build the walls back up!

Every generation has had Revival! You can read it in the accounts of church history. Every generation has had *a mighty move of God*, if you prefer it that way – or a revelation – or a renewing of the 5-fold ministry – whether it was termed like that or not. But each move was mishandled – by the leaders – misunderstood. Yet these moves *have* been the attempts of God, or by God, *to enlighten His people!* Every generation has had that! An attempt of God to get His people into position for blessing – for accomplishment – for fulfillment of what He had promised them!

God doesn’t put a carrot in front of our faces to taunt us saying, “Come on, Honey. Keep coming. I’ll give you this if you want it. Come on...” We leaders must not do that to the people either! I cannot fulfill God’s promises to you. Only God can, and will – *if He’s the One who’s promised*. And it’s time for us to become comfortable with that and inquire, “Are we meeting the conditions for Him to fulfill the promises?”

Nehemiah says, “*Mr. King, Sir, I need you to release me to do this thing back home*” – gaining the favor of those who had authority over him (vs.7,8). **We cannot just ignore authority.** The scripture admonishes: “*Obey them that have the rule over you*” (Rom.13:1,2). That refers to governmental authority – the laws of the land in which we live. We have to work within the laws of our society. ***If we think we are above the law, we will never ever be a light bright enough to reveal His glory!*** You can’t just run the stoplight. You can’t build a building that doesn’t meet city codes and say, “but we’re a church.” God never intended for us to try to circumvent any authority.

This is a day when we’re being tested. It’s a day when the Lord is saying, “*I want to bless you. I really want to multiply you. I really do want to – in every area of your lives.*” So He blesses us a little bit at a time, just as we do with our children. We release levels of authority to them according to their ability to handle the responsibilities. The work God is about to do is going to be a quick work. It really is.

Everything we have encountered and conquered in life has been preparation for where we are right now, today.

Even though the Book of Nehemiah covers a larger span of time, the actual building of the walls lasted only 58 days. It was a matter of needing a leader. *The Book of Nehemiah is about leadership.* It's a wonderful book on leadership in the church. The situation in Israel wasn't any different after Nehemiah heard about it than it was before. It was, however, that he was stirred enough to say, "God, let's You and me do something." Why do we put up with always being run over by people? We can partner with God in every area of our lives – but somehow we forget that.

Nehemiah has been given favor with man, and I believe God wants the church to have that kind of favor today. I believe the police departments and schools ought to be knocking on our church doors saying, "Can you assist us? You seem to have a rapport with young people (or, with the homeless, or addicts, or whatever). You seem to have something great going on here." But, by and large, we're too afraid – to intermingle with "the world."

In chapter 2, verses 11-16, Nehemiah goes to the place in question with the permission of the king. "Yes, *you may build your building.*" So, Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem. After staying there 3 days... What is he doing for 3 days? He's looking at the situation firsthand. He's assessing the circumstances. He's discovering some details. But he's not broadcasting what his intent is. "What's really going on here?" is his main question.

Pastor, how long has it been since you, personally, *really* looked at your church? We have our little piece of paper on Sunday mornings – the "Order of Worship" – a listing of what's going to take place in the service. But, do we really know what's *needed* by our own people? Have we taken the spiritual temperature of our congregations? Have we paid attention to what people are asking? Or, have we set our own little agendas? "Opening prayer. Brother So-and-So should do that – because he needs to be recognized. Offertory music..." ☺ Too often we dismiss God in the first part of the service. It's like the Lord has to say, "Ooops! I'm sorry I barged in here. I thought this was My House." ☺

Nehemiah is looking at the scene – the whole scene. We need to look at families – whole families. Don't appoint others to give oversight for you until you know what the real need is! It's amazing to me what goes on in counseling sessions – in the name of your church – that you haven't a clue is being discussed or what sorts of problems your flock is facing! It's amazing to me – that a pastor would allow that to happen! "Well, we trust our counselors." I'm not talking about *trust*. I'm talking about – do you know what kinds of things your counselors are handling?

How *clean* is your church? "Well, I don't... They're pretty faithful. They come all the time. They must be paying their tithe – we're paying our bills." That's not good enough, Friend. You need to take 3 days off like Nehemiah did – or however long it takes – to look at the whole scene, assessing the trouble areas. How many marriages are teetering on the brink of divorce and you don't even know it? How many children are sitting in churches *bitter* at God because Mom and Dad sit there too, singing the praises of God but living like the devil at home?

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah must assess the damages. The text says, "After staying there 3 days, I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on" (2:11,12). Oh, if you don't understand me, leaders, I promise you, you're going to hate what I am about to say! ☺ and I forgive you – ahead of time. ☺

Many a vision has been lost because it was shared too soon with too many. When God gives you – we use the word "strategies" today – when God gives you a strategy for repair, or a vision for future building (in the natural or spiritual realms), or whatever specific fits your circumstances – when He gives it to you, it is just as important that He gives you a *nighttime* – a time when you can't see ahead or behind you.

That's so that the only open window is up! Your prayer in those times should be, "Lord, do I have *any* confidants with which I can share this?" He'll show you those few individuals – those with whom you can share your vision and who can be entrusted to go with you to *see* (assess and evaluate) the situation.

How often do you pray with the leaders in your church? Not – "how often do they pray?" but how often do *YOU* pray with them? That's what leadership is. I'm afraid we've reduced leadership to preaching – and teaching – and prophesying. My Friends, those are all wonderful and I do not despise them (see 1Thes.5:20), but that's not the sum total of being the pastor or leader.

Nehemiah reports, "*I had not told anyone what God had put on my heart*" (vs.12). By night he went out and says, "*I went through the Valley Gates and I went through the Jackal Wall and the Dung Gate*" (vs.13) Do you even *know* which are the Dung Gates in your city? "Oh well, you know, I can name those streets. It's terrible what goes on down there!" Did you ever make an assessment of all that? Just for yourself? And then wonder, "How can we... how can *my church* make a difference in this place?"

I know a pastor that was almost excommunicated by his denomination because he started checking out the Dung Streets in San Francisco – and literally going physically into the bars in those places. "Oh, my word! Eating with sinners! (see Mt.9:11; Mk.2:16; Lk.5:30; 15:2) – and things!" But that's how God was leading him to minister in his city. He was sitting at a table with homosexuals, telling them the Kingdom of God had come for *them*. And so the denomination said, "That's suspicious! There must be something going on – with him!" Are you okay, Church? Would you "lose your salvation" if you walked into a bar? What about a "gay bar?" If that is so, you don't have much then, do you! ☺ Keep your thimble clear! That's the only sized cup you're holding! ☺ Come on! Let's take our biggest buckets out there and let God fill them to over-flowing!

"I don't have to keep that call. That was for *him* in his city." Not everyone does carry that *call*, but we must take a look at the Dung Gates! Every church has people in its congregation who could minister to them successfully!

Then, we also should go to the palaces and the upper streets and to all the people. We look at and assess the situations. Why do you think you are where you are? Why your appointment? In your city? Do you believe God just carelessly places us as game pieces? I hope you can hear this. It doesn't matter whether you're a king or a queen or a rook or... or "only" a pawn. God has placed each one of us with purpose. I'm telling you, soon we're going to hear a sound from heaven that says to all of creation, "CHECKMATE!!" and that might come from the moving of one little pawn! We'll be a part of it all but only if we've looked at the *whole board* – the whole scope of things – and recognize this: "God, You placed me. Don't let me miss the move You want to make with me."

"*Then, I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool*" (vs.14). Do you know what's going on in other "*fountains*" in your area? Other churches? Water in the scriptures remind us of the Word and places of refreshing, of God's provision. What's happening in the church down the block from you? Or, perhaps, a mile away?

Years ago, I was going through the invitations I had received to speak and minister and discovered I had eight different requests from one city – eight invitations from eight different churches. My secretary asked, "What are you going to do? If you go to one, you'll offend the other." So, I wrote them all the same letter and said, "I'd like you to meet together and decide in which *one* of your church buildings we'll hold the meeting." ☺ Amazingly, it worked. Miraculously, actually. Men that hadn't spoken to each other for years – or ever – were working together on getting this "woman" to come and preach, everyone probably wondering who invited her! ☺ They did it – I went – God moved and blessed in the meetings. I wish I could still do that and get by with it!

I'm telling you – that's a picture of the Kingdom. Instead of one person going from here to that little spot and another going from there to that one... and we don't know what's going on across town! We don't

even look at the other *fountains*! “Well, what’s happening at that church?” “Oh, I don’t know. I... uh... a lot of our people went over there for a meeting.” “Well, is that good?” “Well, I ...” To *me*, dear Friends, it’s good!” ☺ To our detriment, we have carried a business principle of *competition* into the church world!

I told someone yesterday, I’ve never gone into a Chinese restaurant to order a Mexican taco! ☺ Church, if they want something you don’t serve, and it’s being served over there – what’s *your* problem? Are you building your own church – or the Kingdom of God? Why don’t we bring the people forward who want to go “over there,” lay hands on them, and ask God to make them a *mighty* blessing wherever they go?

“And the King’s Pool (vs.14). There wasn’t enough room for my mount to get through so I went up to the Valley by night, examining the wall and finally, I turned back and re-entered through the Valley Gate. The officials (vs.16) didn’t know where I had gone or what I was doing because as yet I said nothing to the Jews or the priests or the nobles or the officials or any others who would be doing the work.”

Nehemiah must know the *timing*! Tell the truth: Isn’t that one of the most difficult things we do – is to know *when*? You can do the right thing at the wrong time and miss the whole shebang! Timing is – important! But you see, he can’t come back to his Board – I mean, these officials ☺ – Nehemiah cannot return to them and get from them the timing, because they do not have the vision yet! There is a right moment for him to share his vision and the reason the timing is so important is that if God hasn’t prepared these individuals to receive “like vision” it will be voted down or diminished!

I don’t think I’m exaggerating when I say “always” but to be careful I’ll say, “almost always,” when I pray concerning the delivery of a message I’m going to be speaking, I say, “Lord, let there be an equal anointing on the hearing ears as on the mouthpiece.” Otherwise, a great message simply doesn’t bear much fruit. If you don’t have ears to hear – even if I have the mouthpiece of the Lord for this given moment of time – it isn’t going to accomplish a thing. And that’s timing. Timing is everything! “Lord, bring out of me just what You’ve prepared them to receive.” That’s where boldness comes. I dare to say it because I believe He has you ready for this message at this moment! And so God says to Nehemiah, “Alright. It’s time to present this to the people.”

Verse 17. *“And I said to them, ‘you see the trouble we’re in – Jerusalem lies in ruins, its gates have been burned with fire. Come. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be a disgrace!’ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God (vs.18) upon me and what the king had said to me. And they replied, ‘Let’s do it! Let us start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work.”*

That’s leadership! First, a leader (like Nehemiah) knows the problem – sights it out, has permission from God and from the local authority; knows exactly what the problems are – where they are – and what can be done to repair the damage. Then he presents it to the people. Not – “I want *you* to do this” but, “*Let us....*” You’ll always have those who’ll say, “Oh, pastor. Who are we? We’re the smallest church in the community. Who are we to try something so big? We’re just barely able to build our own wall!” ☺ I’m certain you’ve heard those words or ones much like them! ☺

What he says is, “**Let us, in the midst of seeing the need, see the GOD who supplies! See the God who strengthens!**” “*Unto Him who is able to do exceeding*” – exceeding – not just barely! “...*exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask*” (Eph.3:20) – or even that we saw in the nighttime.

“Well, that’s great.” The people say, “Alright. Let’s do it!” (vs.18) And then – the problems start. You get the people motivated and I can promise (or threaten you ☺) that the very next move will be the enemy’s (vs.19). “*It came to pass (chapter 4) that when Sanballat heard we build the wall, he was wrath, filled with indignation and mocked the Jews.*”

Why are we amazed when the enemy mocks us? That’s his name! Accuser (Rev.12:10) – deceiver (2Jn.7) – liar – father of lies – no truth in him (Jn.8:44). Often his plan is simply to wear out the saints.

How many of us understand that? You see, if the devil hasn't been bothering you... Oh, it really isn't the devil himself, it's all his little imps. If the spirits – the anti-God, anti-everything-good spirits, anti-Christ – haven't been bothering you, that just means you're not bothering them! You're no threat!

We have the phrase in our society – “Don't make waves!” That is terrible in the church. We ought to be making waves! If we don't make waves, there's no stirring of the water! (Jn.5:7) Of course, we're going to make waves! We have permission; we have the right; we have the materials; and now we're starting to build. “Oh no!” the enemy cries, “They're going to do something!” And the enemy starts the taunts – the making fun of our attempts.

Here's the voice of the enemy. The first question he asks is (4:2) “*What are they doing?*” I mean, it's one thing for them to have church. But now – that little motley crew – they're rebuilding what we anti-good, evil spirits have torn down!”

One of the most powerful spirits that has torn down the walls we once had up is “the people's rights.” By the way, that's what Laodicea means (see Rev.3:14ff). Look it up. The people's rights. The people's rights. The minute we voted that thing into action, we took the authority of the Almighty God (in Whom we say we trust) and gave it to the people. Now, the people have a *right* to vote against – Christianity – in the very nation that was founded for the purpose of worshipping the Almighty God! Can't put up a cross; can't have a manger scene; can't sing about God; can't pray in the schools. All these can't – can't – can't – came through the evil spirit of “the people's rights!”

If it was just obvious (like hot or cold), it wouldn't be *lukewarm* (see Rev.3:15,16). But because it's only lukewarm, we missed it. He says, “Because you're neither hot nor cold, I'll spew you out of My mouth” (Rev. 3:16). I had trouble understanding that for years. It seemed reasonable to me that lukewarm actually was a little better than cold. And I finally said to the Lord, “Why would You spew lukewarm out instead of cold?” He said, “Because if they're cold toward Me I'll still speak to them; they'll still hear My mouth. And if they're hot” (we like the words “on fire” better) “I'll give fresh truth and revelations! They will experience My mouth. I will spit on the eyes that are blind! And they will open! (Jn.9:1ff) Eph-pha-tha – I will speak to deaf ears and they will hear! (Mk.7:34) But those who are lukewarm will no longer experience My mouth. I'll spew them out.”

Church, are you there? We need to be very careful what we're embracing! “Well, you know, that's their belief.” What's their belief? “Well, you know, we have our beliefs and the Muslims have their beliefs and the ...” Where did that come from? We have more rights for prisoners than we do for the people who have been offended! WAKE UP! Church! “Well,” you say, “we didn't vote it in.” You're going to hate this, but – yes, we did! **We voted it in by prayerlessness.**

If the Church, if only every Kingdom-man and Kingdom-woman, would recognize the greatness of the God to Whom we sing praise and begin to call on Him saying, “We have sinned! We have missed the signposts along the way! Oh, God, we plead for Your mercy and forgiveness and grace! God, send Your grace again!” I promise, His response will be: “*Then, will I hear from heaven, forgive their sins and heal their land?*” (2Chr.7:14).

“*What are you doing?*” That's the first question of the enemy. His second question is, “*Will you fortify yourselves?*” (Neh.4:2). Do you really think you can protect yourself – if you're up against ‘majority rule?’”

There's the **second big enemy** – “*majority rules.*” Numerical majority rules?? Really? Quote for me that chapter and verse, please. God never needed numerical majority to win! He says, “I AM!” (Ex.3) Moses says, “Well, how are You going to do it? Who's going to give me favor?” And God replied, “I AM.” “Who's going to convince King Pharaoh to release the people? If I go back down there, to Egypt, You know there's a contract out on my life there! Do You really want *me* to go where there's a contract out on me? And I'm supposed to say, ‘God said, Set My people free?’ ☺ “Who am I going to say sent

me?” And God simply says, “I AM.” “Well, don’t You have a Name?” ☺ “I AM.” That’s all Church. “I AM.” I AM! I AM! Oh, we have to come back to I AM! Let the people of God say so! (Ps.107:2).

Here’s my last point – the enemy’s talking: “*Will you, with these burnt stones, rebuild a wall? Can you bring back these stones to life? From the heaps of rubble, burned as they are? You don’t have any new bricks. You think... HA! Aw, you’re no threat!*”

Now, that’s a valid question: Will we? Will we rebuild with the *burned stones*? By fishing them out of the rubble of society? You would be shocked, some of you, if you talked to some of those stoned out on drugs and drink and promiscuity and all the other things that *we* think of as the “worst sins.” You would be surprised to hear their backgrounds. “I used to be where you are. My Dad was a minister.” “My grandfather...” “I used to be...” “I know this tongue-speaking stuff.” You, my Friend, would be shocked! But they got burned – in the Church!

You couldn’t build a building BIG enough to handle all the burnt stones in your own area! But it takes time and grace and mercy and lending our faith – and not just once! We have to become the parents they never had; we have to become the good Dad and help them forget the one that raped. Are you there, Church? It isn’t a one-time thing: “Come with us. Bless your heart. You’re no good, but *we’ll* receive you.” Oh, please!

Our ministry starts at the altar – *me* at the altar! Until I can take hold of the heart of the Father – His loving and compassionate heart – until I can go out there and pour *Him* out to them – saying, and meaning it: “What do you need? What will it take? What would make a believer out of you again?” *Burnt stones*. It takes time to scrape them off and it takes time to fit them into place with the ones who have never been burned.

Have you ever watched stonemasons at work? They pick up a stone – they have the right place for it – they wipe it with the mortar – (that’s the Holy Ghost). Then, they reach up and one just doesn’t quite fit in a certain spot. They don’t throw it away! They just whack it in the right place! ☺ They rub it a little bit on something rough to remove what doesn’t fit – then put it in the mortar again – and again – and again – and again... and we set them in the wall beside stones that don’t know if they even want those scarred ones there! What will hold it altogether? Mortar – the Holy Spirit. We can’t just put them up there and expect a new stone to support them! They’d vote them out! But if we get enough of the divine glue of God!! Oh, that Holy Ghost anointing! It comes from the new to the old, and if they will receive, you find pretty soon you couldn’t point to the wall and tell which is the most important stone. We need them all! Living stones (1Pet.2:5) set upon the cornerstone (Jesus).

I was a guest in a church in northern California. It had the most incredible musical talent of any church I’ve ever been in – and I’ve been in more than a few! The music was so versatile, from Rock to Opera. It was absolutely astounding to me! The quality of the music and voices and instruments and the ... I was just basking in the glory of it all! Sitting next to the pastor, I could hardly speak for the weight of His glory and sensed Presence. It was just so wonderful!

Soon, the pastor leaned over to me and said, “You’re enjoying yourself, aren’t you?” I said, “I do love good music.” Then he went on, “Let me tell you...” and began to go through the orchestra and the soloists and the choir members – reporting: “That one was on drugs. That one was...” and gave me the background of these *burnt stones*. “We rescued that one out of a bar. We got that one from over there...”

And here we are, sitting in our churches saying, “Oh, God! Send us leaders!” And the Holy Spirit is saying, “Pick up the burnt stones! Rub them off and set them in place!”