

## Legacy

### Part 4 – Better Together

#### Intro

Over the past few weeks, we have discovered the setting and landscape of Nehemiah's life, as it appears on the landscape of world [and biblical] history. While in captivity in Persia, Nehemiah attained the very desirable role of cupbearer to the king. His position afforded him many things, one of which was access to the king.

After discovering that his people and city were living in less than desirable conditions, Nehemiah had a choice to make – would he keep his position and life safe or would he risk everything to help his people? After spending 4 months in prayer with God, continuing to go to work day-after-day, Nehemiah had the courage to go before the king and make his appeal for the chance to return home to begin rebuilding the city's war-torn walls.

Nehemiah then went one step further and asked the king to write a letter [affirming his mission] and also for timber from the king's best forest. The king not only granted Nehemiah's requests, but also provided a traveling party to attend Nehemiah's return – complete with the officers of the king's army and horsemen.

Last week, we saw Nehemiah ride into town with a force and resources in tow. The people of the city were clearly filled with hope, but Nehemiah was quickly met with resistance. A number of the people's key opponents came out to the town square to show their authority and display their displeasure. What we saw from Nehemiah was an amazing ability to keep his mouth shut, his plans close, and his mission primary.

He spent 3 days looking over the city, inspecting the walls, and devising a plan. After strategizing for days, he called all of the city together and shared with them his desire to rebuild the city walls. His Braveheart speech, impassioned the people to rise up and commit to building with him. Nehemiah had captured their hearts, and the people prepared for the work ahead. However, their opposition arose [and grew] in the face of their decision.

We have a saying around here that helps us see spiritual warfare more clearly, so that we are not surprised or discouraged when it takes place. ***Every time you take a step toward God, the enemy takes a step toward you.***

Just as Nehemiah had faced a *defining moment* in his life 4 months earlier, the people were now faced with a similar decision. What would they do? Would they shrink back at the first sign of real adversity? Or would they continue to move forward in the conviction and calling they had committed their hands to?

#### **3:1-3**

**Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.**

Group by group, family by family, gate by gate. Listed carefully in [seemingly] monotonous detail.

## **[Map of Jerusalem Walls]**

(beginning at the Sheep Gate and going counterclockwise until reaching the Sheep Gate once again)

This chapter almost reads like the genealogies we either fall asleep reading or bypass because they seem too repetitive. However, it reveals a number of important characteristics:

### **1) God is a God of Order [Orchestrated Plan]**

The records in Nehemiah 3 have a similar sound to that of another group of Israelites in the past. Earlier in their history, the people of God traveled across the country to enter the land God had promised their people. As they journeyed, God designed and orchestrated the way they camped and marched.

***The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “The people of Israel shall camp each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' houses. They shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side.” Numbers 2:1-2***

The tabernacle [representation of the presence of God] was to sit in the center of the camp, while the Levites [priests] were placed in the middle with it. Outside of that, the tribes were placed on all sides of the tabernacle.

The tribe of Judah [and 2 other tribes] was positioned on the east side of the tabernacle. They were the first to march.

The tribe of Reuben [and 2 other tribes] was positioned on the south side of the tabernacle. They were the second to march.

The tribe of Ephraim [and 2 other tribes] was positioned on the west side of the tabernacle. They were the third to march.

The tribe of Dan [and 2 other tribes] was positioned on the north side of the tabernacle. They were the fourth to march.

In all, over 603,000 fighting men over the age of 20 [and their families] made up the camps, tribes, and clans – all precisely ordered and positioned to best protect the tabernacle and defend themselves as they traveled across the land.

It’s a picture of nearly 2 million people, from various tribes and clans, able to march in perfect harmony. Like listening to a symphony. Each individual part is important but sounds chaotic as each one tunes their instrument...until the moment when the conductor brings them all together in unity and harmony. The order which brings them all together creates a magical piece of musical art.

The order listed here gives a sustainable structure to make sure the wall is properly built.

### **2) Nehemiah Led with a Strategy [Systematic Approach]**

Nehemiah allocated the work within the community. Each person is positioned either by family, by where they lived, or in guilds [by their trade/skill]. The wall divided up into nearly 40 sections, of which each group would take one and build or repair.

Notice the priests in verse 1 who worked on the Sheep Gate. This gate was appropriately named because of the sheep who were brought through it for sacrifice, as it was near the Temple. The priests being stationed at this gate afforded them access to the Temple, where they would prepare and offer sacrifices.

Nehemiah systematically assigned people to places where they already lived, had influence, or were properly trained to do their best work. The people, the wall, and Nehemiah are a picture of Jesus' strategy for building His Church.

***And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13***

Nehemiah stationed his people on the wall according to their place and skill, so that the entire wall might be built up – no longer lacking security.

Jesus has given leaders to His Church and gifts to His people [whom He expects to work], so that the entire body might be built up – no longer lacking maturity.

Both have a strategy to best position the individuals for the benefit of the whole. Unfortunately, not *everyone* joined in the work.

**3:5**

**And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.**

It is possible that the people of this region resented Nehemiah's leadership or did not worship Yahweh God, and such did not join in the effort. The same is true with the Church. Some will not join in the reconstruction, for whatever reason. Whether they do not respect the leaders, agree with the vision, or desire to sacrifice and use their gifts to serve others. It's extremely unfortunate, because Jesus was clear that the body is built up into maturity, and Kingdom wins, when people use their individual gifts to serve others.

### **3) The People Worked Together [Shoulder-to-Shoulder]**

The people responded to Nehemiah's challenge and vision. This account shows that it wasn't just a select few who led the rebuilding effort. It wasn't simply the leaders who bore the brunt of the work. The people, as a whole [minus a few outliers], took their spot on the wall and began working together. And remember, not many of them were trained or skilled wall builders.

#### **Spaghetti Marshmallow Challenge**

*The Culture Code*

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A few years ago, designer and engineer **Peter Skillman** held a competition to find out *why certain groups add up to be greater than the sum of their parts, while others add up to be less*. Over several months, he assembled a series of four-person groups at Stanford, the University of California, the University of Tokyo, and other places. He challenged each group to build the tallest possible structure using the following items:

- \* **20 pieces of uncooked spaghetti**
- \* **1 yard of transparent tape**
- \* **1 yard of string**
- \* **1 standard marshmallow**

**The contest had one rule: the marshmallow had to end up on top.**

Some of the teams consisted of business school students. The others consisted of kindergartners.

### *Business Leaders Approach*

The business students got right to work. They examined the materials and tossed ideas back and forth. The discussion was very professional, rational, and intelligent. They chose a direction, divided up the tasks, and began building.

### *Kindergarten Approach*

The kindergartners took a different approach. They did not ask questions or propose options. In fact, they barely talked at all. They stood very close to one another. Their interactions were not smooth or organized. They abruptly grabbed materials from one another and started building. Their entire technique might be described as *trying a bunch of stuff together*.

If you had to bet which of the teams would win, it would not be a difficult choice. You would bet on the business school students, because they possess the intelligence, skills, and experience to do a superior job. This is the way we normally think about group performance. We presume skilled individuals will combine to produce skilled performance.

### *Winner & Sizes*

Your bet would be wrong. In dozens of trials, **kindergartners** built **structures that averaged 26" tall**, while **business school students** built **structures that averaged less than 10" tall**.

And just so we did not dismiss the results of this experiment with *business students still have a lot to learn*, Skillman also put lawyers and CEOs to the test. However, teams of kindergartners also defeated the teams of **lawyers** (who built towers that **averaged 15"**) as well as teams of **CEOs (22")**.

### *Illusion*

The result is hard to believe because it feels like an illusion. We find it difficult to think that professionals would produce such a poor result.

On the other hand, we see unsophisticated, inexperienced kindergartners and we find it difficult to imagine they could produce a successful performance.

### *Individual Skills vs Interaction*

We tend to focus on what we can see – *individual skills*, but these are not what matters. What matters is the *interaction*.

The business school students seem to be interacting but are rather just figuring out who is in charge, is it ok to criticize someone's behavior, and what are the rules here. Instead of focusing on the task, they are worrying about one another. They are so concerned with their status, they find it difficult to prioritize the task over the mission.

The actions of the individual kindergartners seem random and chaotic. However, when you view them as a unit they are effective. They are not competing for status. They stand shoulder-to-shoulder and work energetically together. They experiment and take risks. **The kindergartners succeeded, not because they are smarter, but because they worked together in a smarter way.** They have tapped into a simple and powerful method which allows a group of ordinary people to create a powerful performance that is greater than the sum of their parts.

#### **4:1-3**

**Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!”**

Nehemiah’s opponents saw the people working, and just as you would imagine the business students, lawyers, and CEOs must have viewed the kindergartners, they thought *what a weak group of people...there is no way they will ever accomplish this task*. The adversaries question their competency, their work ethic, and their integrity.

#### **4:6**

**So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.**

After praying to God and pleading their case, the people continued to work.

*So we – the unorganized, feeble, incompetent, discounted, regular, ordinary group of people decided we were doing this...shoulder-to-shoulder, family to family, each taking our position on the wall – and built what no one could have expected. Half way up, likely 8 feet thick in most places, the wall was making progress.*

A group of everyday, unskilled, untrained men and women were accomplishing the unimaginable. Despite the adversity, even with those not pulling their weight, the people of God believed – they believed that He could [and desired to] actually use them [together] to do something great!