

Rebuilding the Ruins

This article was written by Dan Hitz, Director of Reconciliation Ministries. It is adapted from a sermon that Dan delivered at River's Edge Church in Sterling Heights, Michigan.

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. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity.

Jeremiah 29:11-14a, New International Version



Many of us wake up one day and realize that our lives are a train wreck. We may have been wounded by others or broken by our own sin. Other times we are blindsided by the trials of life while we are walking in obedience and sincerely following the Lord with all of our hearts. However it happened, we begin to wonder, "How did I get here from there?" The rebuilding process can be overwhelming... "There's so much work to do..." "I've always been a useless loser, what hope do I have that anything will ever change?" "I don't know how to do normal. When is the next bomb going to go off?" Regardless of our fears, we must make a conscious effort to reach out for godly help and begin to rebuild.

The book of Nehemiah offers us many insights into the rebuilding process. After the Jews returned from exile to Jerusalem, the walls of the city were in ruins. Nehemiah heard about the poor condition of Jerusalem and boldly asked King Artaxerxes if he could return to his people and rebuild the wall. Although the book of Nehemiah deals with a corporate rebuilding process, the many lessons learned also apply to the individual rebuilding process of repentance and recovery.

Nehemiah 1:4 – *Nehemiah first had to recognize that there was a problem.* We see in this verse that others went up to him and told him of the destruction. Nehemiah didn't respond with denial, rather he accepted the fact that there was a problem and went to God in a time of intense prayer to ask for direction.

Nehemiah 1:5-11 – *We can see many ingredients in Nehemiah's prayer that we need in our own prayers for recovery.* First, there is worship. He acknowledges that God is a God of mercy and that He cares for His people. Nehemiah then begins a time of confession and repentance. No denial, no excuses, no blame shifting. He clearly states, "Both my father's house and I have sinned." After his repentance, Nehemiah is clearly broken and accepts the consequences of sin while asking the Lord for mercy and deliverance. When you read this section of Scripture, you'll also notice that Nehemiah includes Scriptures and the promises of God in his prayer. This is something that we can also include in our prayer life – a Scriptural acknowledgment of what we truly deserve – and the acknowledgement of mercy, hope, and calling. Finally, Nehemiah prays for favor with the rulers who can truly help him in the rebuilding process. None of us can rebuild our shattered lives on our own. We all need the help of faithful leaders over us, as well as peers who are willing to walk with us as they also rebuild their lives.

Nehemiah 2:2-6 - *Recovery involves risk.* Those around us may not understand or support us in the process. Others may have a vested interest in our remaining broken. Nehemiah risked execution by appearing before the king heavily burdened. In this conversation we can see that Nehemiah prayed his way through. He acknowledged boundaries which the king expected him to follow. Sometimes the hardest thing for a person in recovery to accept is that they now have boundaries and accountability. They must call their spouse or accountability partner and account for their whereabouts at all times. Even good things they used to do are frequently called into question. Those who are broken and accept the consequences for their sin, are willing to work within the



boundaries and accountability set up by their leaders. Finally, Nehemiah acquired letters of authorization and the necessary provisions for his rebuilding project. He had to rely on the authority and equipping of the king to be successful.

Nehemiah 2:9-10 *When evil men named Sanballat and Tobiah heard that Nehemiah was going to restore the walls of Jerusalem, they became incensed.* When we start our recovery, the devil is not going to stand around and watch – neither are certain people in our lives. People in dysfunctional groups don't like someone upsetting the way they've always done things. They don't like it when they can't get away with the same old sins anymore. This shouldn't come as a surprise, we've given the enemy permission to trample over us for a long time and he likes inflicting pain on us. We should seek God for strength and protection and hold up our shield of faith. Nehemiah again went to safe men he could trust for support.



Nehemiah 2:19-20 – *The attacks began with ridicule and accusations of rebellion.* There are additional places in Scripture where those who are doing wrong accuse others of being the ones who are doing the wrong. In Exodus, Chapter 2 when Moses confronted the Israelites who were fighting, it was the offender who accused Moses. It's no surprise that the devil is called "the accuser of the brethren". If he can throw us into fear and condemnation we become impotent. Nehemiah stood on the authority of the king and knew that his success would not come from human effort, but through "the God of Heaven".

Nehemiah 4:1-6 *The attacks of ridicule and condemnation intensify.* "What are these feeble Jews doing?" They are thrilled to point out the huge amount of work to be done and the "heaps of rubble" that must be cleared out. Tobiah ridiculed the workers by saying, "If even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!" Song of Solomon tells us that "little foxes spoil the vines" (S of S 2:15). The foxes represent the little sins in our lives. How often have you had someone point out your sin to question the sincerity of your faith? Nehemiah didn't flinch. He again turned to God and asked Him to fight the battle for his people. Even with this opposition, the people of Israel built the wall to half its height because "the people worked with all their heart". When we trust in the righteousness of the Lord and in His strength alone, His strength becomes ours.

Nehemiah 4:7-9 *The enemy becomes angry at their progress and launches a spiritual attack.* When the wall (boundaries) reached half its height, a group of enemies got together and tried to "stir up trouble". Other versions read "create confusion" and "hinder". Have you ever experienced this type of struggle right after a great victory. Ephesians 6:12-13 tells us that we aren't struggling against flesh and blood, but against rulers and authorities who have a vested interest in our utter failure. Ephesians instructs us to "put on the full armor of God" and stand our ground in the authority of Christ. In Nehemiah 4:9, we see the Israelites doing just that, "we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat." Remember, Nehemiah didn't try to fight this battle alone. It is always critical to get the help of faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.



Nehemiah 4:10-13 *Discouragement and exhaustion take their toll.* Even successful spiritual warfare takes a lot of strength. Proper boundaries also take a lot of strength. Many twelve-step programs use the phrase HALT – hungry, angry, lonely, tired – to remind people of when they may be more vulnerable. Satan knows this and is ready to pounce. Nehemiah's response to this

was to post the workers by families, "with their swords, spears and bows. These three different weapons represent how we must fight our addiction – in our bodies, our souls, and our spirits. In our bodies it is important to recognize that there are times when they will be "throwing a temper tantrum" to get the illicit sexual release they have been accustomed to. In our souls, it is important to deal with the issues in our hearts that made us susceptible to our bondages in the first place to avoid being the sexualized version of the "dry drunk". The more these roots are dealt with, the less energy it will require to resist the temptations that come our way. We shouldn't be surprised that demonic forces will hurl some fiery darts at us every now and again. It is important that we don't open the door to this harassment by our own sin, and that we stand on the authority of Jesus Christ who stated, "It is finished," as He died upon the cross to secure our victory.

Nehemiah 4:14-21 *We fight this warfare for others as well as ourselves.* Nehemiah urged the Israelites to “fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes”. A key to our victory is getting our eyes off of our own problems and on onto the Lord Jesus Christ. An important key to our recovery



is to start pouring out to others. You may not be ready to teach a Sunday school class or preach a sermon, but everyone can set up folding chairs and clean the church on a volunteer work day. The spiritual side of this can apply to those of us who are fathers and therefore the spiritual covering for our families. If we aren't willing to fight this fight for our own recovery, are we willing to resist the enemy so that we don't open the door for the enemy to gain easy access to our sons and daughters? Are we willing to fight so that others in ministry under us are covered by the umbrella of protection in an authority structure properly aligned in Christ? The responsibility that comes with our calling is high. We can't do it in our own strength, but we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). Verses 15 through 21 show how everyone exercised their specific talent to complete the task set before them. 1 Corinthians 12 shows us that everyone is needed, and that everyone is just as important as everyone else.

Nehemiah 5:1-19 *Opposition from those closest to us.* Wounds inflicted by those we love, or those who were supposed to keep us safe, have the potential to cause the most pain. It is amazing how many people I meet who were wounded decades ago by their parents and who continue to carry the emotional scars years down the road. Others have received wounds from church leaders and those in the church that have made them cynical and withdrawn from the Body. Judas, one of Jesus' intimate twelve disciples, chose to betray Jesus with a kiss – something that should have meant love and loyalty. The same Jesus who was betrayed with a kiss prayed “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,” and came to heal the broken hearted. The Holy Spirit can help us to recovery from the wounds of the past and learn to love and trust again. God can send Nehemiah's into our lives – leaders who have remained faithful to their calling when others around them were taking advantage of the vulnerable. Nehemiah wasn't tooting his own horn in this section of Scripture. He was demonstrating to others who were in the same desperate times that God's ways will work to carry us through the valleys.

Nehemiah 6:1-4 *Dangerous unity. – If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!* When the Israelites completed the wall, but before they could finish the doors, the enemies were trying to get Nehemiah to go outside of his boundaries and into dangerous territory. The enemy loves to lure us out of the safe places and into the land of sin. Sometimes the subtle lies sound very appealing and we try to convince ourselves that little excursions outside of our boundaries won't hurt us. Sanballat and Geshem were persistent in their efforts to lure Nehemiah outside the walls to engage in dialogue. Each time he replied that he was too busy to walk away from the place where he belonged. Sometimes people from our past will try to get us to revisit the dialogues of the past. Others seem to love the challenge of targeting Christians to get them to fall. Sometimes God will call us out of our comfort zone to talk to people that we aren't quite sure about; but when He calls, He protects. We need to rely on the Holy Spirit to show us who is safe for us and who isn't, and when He warns we need to obey.

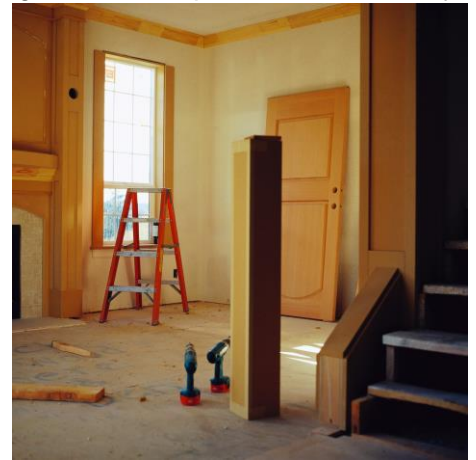
Nehemiah 6:5-9 *Opposition through slander. – The enemy creates a fight and tries to drag us into it.* Sanballat started making false accusations towards Nehemiah and made it sound like everyone else was saying the same thing. He was hoping that Nehemiah would stop rebuilding and start defending himself. Nehemiah didn't fall into that trap. He merely told Sanballat that his accusations were untrue and continued doing what the King had commissioned him to do. The enemy loves to pull us into unfruitful arguments that separate close friends. He tries to make us afraid of the consequences of the lies so that we will take our eyes off of God, focus on the lies, start defending ourselves, and lose our strength. Think back at how drained you were during your last intense conflict. Your anger may have given you strength to argue, but your energy at work and with those you love was drained. We need to follow Nehemiah's lead, pray that God will defend us, and continue what our King has called us to do.

Nehemiah 6:8-14 *The enemy tries to entice us to sin. – Come on, everybody's doing it!* Tobiah and Sanballat hired a man to go to Nehemiah and try to get him to sin. Nehemiah realized their deceit and wrote, "He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me." The stories of betrayal that we hear in the church and by family members are stunning. Those who are jealous of us, or who may benefit from our failure, may try to get us to compromise so that they can point it out to others at a later date and destroy our reputation.

Others who were once a part of our sinful past may feel condemned by our rebuilt lives and entice us to fall so that they can justify their continued addiction. We must respond like Nehemiah and reinforce our boundaries. Those who want to violate our boundaries will tend to push against them, so it is important to rely on God's strength and stand in His authority.

Nehemiah 6:15-16 *The wall is finally done!* As Nehemiah was faithful to work within the boundaries and the authority of the king, there came a day when the rebuilding process was completed. Verse 16 reads, "When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God." Not only did Nehemiah recognize where his strength and ability came from, so did all of his enemies.

People in our lives may not ever embrace our recovery, but they won't be able to deny that there has been a change that God alone could have accomplished. You won't know how many times they have tried to get out of their addiction in their own power and failed. Whether they admit it or not, they have seen the power of God at work in your life. Think of Israel's joy in that day. They were able to look back and remember how God had provided for them and empowered them to have victory over their enemies. Remembering our victories can give us the strength to continue rebuilding our walls, and to expand on that foundation. Only God can empower us to succeed. He is willing! Remember Philippians 1:6, "**...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**"



Nehemiah 6:17-19 *The enemy continues to attack even after we've completed our walls.* Even though Nehemiah and the Israelites completed their walls and were walking in victory, the enemy continued harassing them. In Ephesians 6, Paul reminds us to hold up our shield of faith so that we can "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one". Satan doesn't give up. He knows we can be pretty vulnerable after we've experienced a great victory when we've let down our guard. It is important to utilize the whole armor of God that Ephesians tells us about. We may still be in the battle, but God has already given us the victory.

The rebuilding process is not quick, and it's not easy. Through it we will learn valuable lessons about ourselves and God that we would have never learned any other way. The battles fought, won, and lost have taught us to depend on God. I would not choose to walk through the painful destruction the enemy caused in my early days, but I'm thankful for the redemption that the Lord has brought. It has made me the man that I am today. If you are walking in bondage, or just beginning your recovery, I can assure you that the battle is well worth it. Jesus Christ will give you victory as you walk in Him. If you have been walking in recovery for a while now, you know the precious times spent in the Father's arms as He carries you through the fire. **We at Reconciliation Ministries want to strengthen you in your journey. If you need help, call 586.739.5114.**



May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 New International Version