

## 1. Starting new work here – Grace Missions OC

- A. We have logo being worked on – domain names locked down
- B. Been led to contacts – going out Thursday to homeless camp in Aliso Viejo to evangelize
  - 1). Speaking with others about how we can reach out as a church
  - 2). It's still fuzzy – always is in a new work – as we pray – step out – it gets clearer

**Point:** Things are progressing nicely – but that hasn't gone unnoticed by the devil

- A. Been doing this long enough to know any new work of God will meet resistance

**Alan Redpath:** “There is no winning without warfare; there is no opportunity without opposition; there is no victory without vigilance. For whenever the people of God say, “Let us arise and build,” Satan says, “Let me arise and oppose.”

## 2. Why I feel the need to study Nehemiah right now

- A. A book where a work of God begins – is opposed – succeeds
- B. In it we will be looking for three things
  - 1). The schemes of the devil
    - a). We'll see the tool he uses are men to oppose them but he is pulling the strings
 

**What Paul said: Eph 6:12 (ESV) ... *we do not wrestle against flesh and blood*, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**
    - b). As we uncover his schemes will be encouraging – what you're going through is normal  
It will be eye opening – “Oh! That's what is happening to me!”  
It will be instructive – we will know what to expect and strategize accordingly
  - 2). We will also discover the proper response to these attacks
  - 3). We will learn vital characteristics of the godly leader
    - a). Don't know much about Nehemiah – descendant of a Jew taking into Babylon in exile
    - b). But we do know through this – he was an godly man and an effective leader
      - 1a). Man of prayer who was faithful and focused - finished the work he was called too

**Point:** So were looking for three things as we go through

- A. How the devil attacks
- B. How the believer responds
- C. How the godly leader leads
  - 1). This is not going to be an in-depth study – going to pick out highlights of these 3 things

**Thought:** Before we move on – let me tell you one way the devil attacks

- A. He convinces man he is not real – just cartoon character – red skinned, horned, pointy tail, pitch fork
  - 1). Or he's convinced many (even Christians) that he's just a symbol for all evil in general
  - 2). If you've bought into that lie – you're probably tuning out now – need to clear this up
- B. The Bible is clear – the devil is not fictional – not a cartoon character
- C. Adam and Eve were tempted by a very real devil in the garden  
And so was Jesus when He was tempted in the wilderness – was no made up symbol

**Point:** What we see in this book are tactics of a real devil personally involved in stopping God's work

- A. He will use man as the tools – but the tactics are his

## 3. What happened to Galatians? We'll finish it eventually

- A. My view – I like teaching verse by verse through a book – easier than topical
  - 1). That's not the only way to do it though – Chuck did – Spurgeon! Didn't
    - a). Spurgeon wanted to teach what he felt the church needed to hear each Sunday  
He never went verse by verse through a book – and he did OK

- 2). I like going verse-by-verse but I'm not tied to that technique
  - a). If I feel the church needs something more we will break that pattern
  - b). So you'll see in our catalog – many books taught verse-by-verse AND many series
- 3). Expository teaching doesn't mean verse-by-verse through a book - explain
  - a). I've heard many sermons – verse-by-verse that weren't expository  
I've heard many topical sermons that were – again Spurgeon

**Transition:** Let's pick up the story in chapter 1 where Nehemiah hears some disturbing news

- A. This morning we'll look at the calling of Nehemiah and the way he discerned he was called
  - 1). How to discern God's will

## I. BACKGROUND

**Ne 1:1–3 (ESV)** The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, <sup>(2)</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. <sup>(3)</sup> And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

### 1. Nehemiah is serving as a cup bearer to King Artaxerxes in Susa

- A. Susa was the winter capital for Persian kings – they had a Winter Palace there
- B. Susa was approximately 1000 miles from Jerusalem – long way in those days

### 2. Hanani his brother has just arrived from Jerusalem

- A. He'd gone to Jerusalem some 14 years earlier – under the leadership of Ezra the Priest
- B. Nehemiah rushes to him to hear the news about Jerusalem – seems he expected good news

Ne 1:3 (ESV) And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in *great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.*”

- 1). The walls are still broken down and the gates are all destroyed
- 2). This means the people are living in great trouble – vulnerable to attack at any time
- 3). He adds they are living in shame – had gone to build the walls – claiming to trust God
  - a). But nothing came from it – they are humiliated and ashamed

**Thought:** By Nehemiah's reaction – it seems this is not what he expected to hear

### 3. A brief history of Jerusalem and its destruction (Dates are approximate)

- A. 600 B.C. Nehemiah invaded Judah and ransacked the city of Jerusalem
  - 1). Babylonian armies destroyed temple – broke down the walls – took the people into exile
- B. But even though the people were living 1000 miles away they lived in hope
  - 1). The prophets foretold God would raise up a Persian king who would allow the people to return
  - 2). That King was Cyrus who defeated Babylon and allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem
  - 3). Eventually there would be three waves of exiles who returned
- C. The first wave of 50,000 exiles returned to the homeland – 520 BC – led by Zerubbabel
  - 1). Their priority was to rebuild the Temple – to return worship to the Jewish people
  - 2). As usual the work came under attack from the people in the land
    - a). Who didn't want to see the Jewish culture and Temple reestablished
  - 3). Resistance was fierce – people gave in – stopped building the Temple for a 15 year period
    - a). The Lord sent Haggai and Zechariah who challenged the people's way of life  
They were beautifying their own homes – while house of the Lord was in ruins
    - b). They were able to stir the people to action – the Temple was finally finished
- D. Second wave of exiles returned around 458 BC – under leadership of Ezra the priest (Hanani was in this)

- 1). Priority was to re-establish the spiritual and moral life of the people which was deplorable  
And to re-build the city and the walls (to go along with the rebuilt Temple)
  - 2). Again work halted – as pagan officials wrote to King Artaxerxes  
Warning him – if Jews rebuild walls – they’ll become strong and secure - stop paying taxes
    - a). Artaxerxes decided to stop the work as he considered the matter
  - 3). When the King pulled his support, the surrounding people poured in
    - a). They destroyed any work that had been done on the wall
  - E. When Hanani rode into Susa it had been 14 years after he left with Ezra to rebuild the walls
    - 1). So exciting when that second wave left – Jerusalem would be restored
      - a). The Jewish worship and culture would be alive and well – thriving!
    - 2). But the news Nehemiah received devastated him
      - a). The city is not rebuilt – the walls are still in ruins – the people are afraid and ashamed  
“Nehemiah, Jerusalem’s not rebuilt. Its condition is worse than it was before we left.”
  - F. I can see Nehemiah slump down into a chair – the wind knocked out of him
    - 1). This isn’t the way it’s supposed to be! God said He’d restore Jerusalem
    - 2). *Maybe the Jews will never have a homeland again – how discouraging*
- Thought:** This is a very important moment in Nehemiah’s life – beginning of God’s call

## II. THE CALLING OF NEHEMIAH

**Ne 1:4 (ESV)** As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

### 1. What does he do? Scheme – strive

- “I have a friend who is a wall expert! I’ll get him.” “I know somebody on the city board. We’ll get permission”  
“We need finances. We need to make a thermometer that shows how much we need and what we’ve got”
- A. No! He prays. Weeps. Fasts.  
Cries out to God “This can’t be God! Something must be done! Your glories involved here”
  - B. How long did this intense prayer go on? *Four Months!*  
From month of Chislev (1:1) to Nissan (2:1)

### 2. Nehemiah was shattered – this drove him to God to cast himself upon Him

- A. As he prayed God was moving – working in him the heart he needed - that determination necessary
  - 1). Putting that call upon his heart  
If you don’t have this calling – this work of God – ministry will eat you up!
- B. Spurgeon said if you can be happy doing anything else but be in ministry – do that!
  - 1). Why? God hasn’t called you – *He hasn’t done this work where you MUST minister*
  - 2). The call to ministry is not a call to try something – it is a compelling call
    - a). It is a work of God that you feel you MUST respond to
- C. Chuck Smith – ministry has the highest highs and lowest lows
  - 1). What keeps the minister faithful in those low times – when he feels like quitting
    - a). God has so moved upon his heart he knows he can’t quit  
He knows he will never be happy doing anything else

**Point:** Four months of intense prayer – by the end of that time Nehemiah knew he was called

- A. This was something he MUST do – regardless of the danger or difficulty
  - 1). There was still a million questions – but he knew he MUST go to Jerusalem

**Transition:** We are going to see devils attack. Believers response. *Characteristics of a godly leader.*

### 3. Our first characteristic of a godly leader: **They are people who pray**

- A. He sees the need and is willing to wait on God for His plan and His timing
  - 1). He sees the need – Lord am I the right one to meet it?
- B. I’ve heard the need is the calling – I don’t think so – I’ve seen many wrong men meet needs
  - 1). It was a lousy fit and they ended up failing miserably

**Transition:** That is important – am I the one to meet the need – how can I tell if God is calling me?

- A. I worked as a missions Pastor and could go almost anywhere I wanted
  - 1). I had to learn to discern what was from God and what was from me
  - 2). Was I excited because it was God’s will or did I just have to much coffee – caffeine burden
- B. We’re going to look at 4 steps I go through – I’m going to use our call to England as an example

## III. DISCERNING THE WILL OF GOD (4 STEPS)

### First: Ask the question. **Does the desire line up with Scripture?**

#### 1. The Spirit will never lead you in a way that contradicts the Scriptures

- A. If the Bible does not approve of what you’re thinking about – case closed – stop thinking about it
- B. If the Word approves an action then continue to pray about it

#### 2. Nehemiah’s desire did line up with God’s word – it was scriptural

**This is the way he was praying: Ne 1:5–10 (ESV)** And I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>(6)</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father’s house have sinned. <sup>(7)</sup> We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. <sup>(8)</sup> Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, <sup>(9)</sup> but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ <sup>(10)</sup> They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.

- A. There is confession of sin – for himself and for the people of Israel in v. 6-7
- B. He quotes the promise of God in v. 8-9
  - 1). You said if we sinned we’d be scattered  
But **you said** if we returned to you – you’d gather us back into the promised land

#### 3. Here we can add two more characteristics of a godly leader

### **They are people of the Word and they are people who deal with their sin**

- A. They pray. They know the Word. They deal with sin.
  - 1). You can’t lead God’s people if you don’t know God’s Word  
**Is 55:8–9 (ESV)** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. <sup>(9)</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
    - a). Don’t know the word – you lead with your own thoughts
    - b). You may be naturally gifted as a leader – but your thoughts aren’t good enough
  - 2). You can’t lead God’s people if you won’t deal with your sin
    - a). God won’t listen to you or answer your prayers – you’re not a blessing to those under you  
**Is 59:1–2 (ESV)** Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; <sup>(2)</sup> but your **iniquities have made a separation** between you and your God, and **your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.**
      - 1a). Nobody can lead in that condition

#### 4. Carri and I going to England – felt that tug

- A. So first question – is it Biblical? Obviously missions is
  - 1). But are we the one's who supposed to go to England? Grey area isn't it
    - a). I haven't found a verse that says "Bill and Carri thou shalt go to England for 11 years"
  - 2). So we needed to precede to the next step

Does the desire agree with scripture?

#### Second: Through much prayer

##### 1. Nehemiah prayed for 4 months

- A. I've learned when discerning God's will – pray earnestly – and over time I watch my heart
  - 1). What I'm watching for is if that burden I'm feeling remains or dissipates
- B. I trust that God will put His will in my heart – and sustain the desire
 

**Php 2:12–13 (ESV)** 'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>(13)</sup> *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

  - 1). I want to work out what He's worked in – not my own desires – last thing I want
  - 2). I've learned as I surrender to Him – "Lord I only want your will"
    - a). If that initial tug was His will – He will sustain that burden – it will remain  
If it wasn't from Him – over time it will start to fade

**Thought:** When Carri and I felt the tug to go to England we started to pray earnestly every morning

- A. We knew Scripture approved of missions but we needed clarity – are we the ones to go
- B. As we prayed – about 4 months – that small tug turned into a great God given burden for England
  - 1). It didn't fade as I gave my heart to God – it greatly increased

**Transition:** 1. It lines up with the Word. 2. Through surrendered prayer the burden remains

- A. Not a caffeine burden – result of that extra shot in your Café Americano
- B. Brings us to the next step.

#### Third: Circumstances start to line up

##### 1. Start looking for circumstances to line up confirming God's will

- A. Watch what happens – after 4 months of prayer
 

Nehemiah believes he is called – enough to ask the king to be able to go – dangerous

  - 1). That calling is now so strong he must answer it – no matter what  
But even when answering it – doubts linger a bit
- B. God will use circumstances to remove all doubt
 

**Ne 2:1–3 (ESV)** In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. <sup>(2)</sup> And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." *Then I was very much afraid.* <sup>(3)</sup> I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

  - 1). Afraid - because to be sad before a king could lead to your death!
    - a). It was a bad reflection of his administrative prowess - his subjects weren't happy
  - 2). Plus – asking to leave – when the King trusted him with his life
    - a). You just didn't do this – you gave your life to serve the king – He was number 1

##### 2. Watch God answer the prayer of Nehemiah

**The prayer: Ne 1:11 (ESV)** O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, *and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.*” This man = King Artaxerxes

- A. This would be a huge confirmation because this was a huge obstacle
  - 1). Like I said Kings don't let trusted cupbearers go
  - 2). I like big obstacles in my way – it if happens its God – keeps me from making mistake
- B. Nehemiah didn't strive of manipulate – he simply took this problem to God

**Scripture says: Prov 21:1 (NIV)** The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

**Hudson Taylor lived by this principle:** "It is possible to move men through God by prayer alone"

**Transition:** Watch God start to answer that prayer

**Ne 2:4 (ESV)** Then the king said to me, (there is God directing the kings heart) “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.

- A. Famous arrow prayer – in-between the kings question and his answer – a quick “Help God”
  - 1). I love that – that is prayer without ceasing – always aware of that relationship with God
  - 2). I find myself praying like that all the time witnessing – question is asked – “Help God”

**Point:** The divine orchestrator is starting to line circumstances up for Nehemiah

**Ne 2:5–6 (ESV)** And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.”<sup>(6)</sup> And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” *So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.*

- A. What an answer to prayer – what a confirmation of God's will
- B. Sometimes God is answering so much prayer – Nehemiah's hot – he goes for it

**Ne 2:7–8 (ESV)** And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah,<sup>(8)</sup> and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” *And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.*

### 3. Circumstance is a helpful revealer of God's will WHEN linked to prayer and word

- A. Circumstances must bow to the authority of God's Word and prayer
- B. The devil can bring produce circumstances – Ex. Sun Computers – as I prayed – never felt that peace
  - 1). I wanted to take that job - but full-time ministry opened up unexpectedly few weeks later

**Point:** *The word approves the desire – prayer increased the desire – now circumstance confirms the desire*

**Thought:** A great confirmation for Carri and I

- A. Takes so much to move a family overseas – so much has to come together
  - 1). Everything we needed started to come in
    - a). Airline tickets – from a man I didn't even know
    - b). Moving company – man found out – owned Shick moving – moved us overseas
    - c). Finances came in – with no striving at all
- B. Even where we were to go – Carri prayed in morning “Lord we need a man from Macedonia”
  - 1). Story – Paul was seeking Lord's direction – vision of man from Macedonia  
“Come to Macedonia and help us”
  - 2). Same day – went into office – Pastor handed me a letter from England  
Asking our church to plant something in Ashford – “This might be your man from Macedonia”
    - a). He had no idea we had prayed that 30 minutes earlier
- C. We had a list of some 40 things like that – we had no doubt of the calling
  - 1). Starting to see similar things with Grace Missions OC

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## Four: Spiritual Counsel

Prov 11:14 (NKJV) Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

Prov 15:22 (NIV) Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

### 1. Find **SPIRITUAL** brothers & sisters who know you & ask their opinion

A. If you have a big decision to make - about serving God in an area

"Do you think I'm ready for something like this?" "To serve God in this way?"

1). If the vast majority say "Yes, they see a giftedness in that area - great - step out"

2). If all are saying they don't think your ready - the God maybe saying "No"

a). Take a step back - take more time to pray - Why is everybody saying "No"

**Thought:** First Bible study I taught – I sought advice from people I respected

A. They all said – We can see you doing something like that – go for it

B. If they all said – “You! Teach the Bible! You’re kidding right?”

1). I would have had to wonder why God’s people don’t bear witness

**Thought:** Same thing going to England – people we respected thought it was a perfect fit

A. In fact God had spoken to a few who didn’t even know we were praying about it

1). This may not be from God but I keep thinking about you in England – really?

**Transition:** We’re out of time - Let’s close this up – what did we see

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## CONCLUSION

### 1. Saw the call of Nehemiah

A. It lined up with Scripture

B. The burden remained over an extended period – didn’t fade – probably grew

C. Circumstances backed up what he was saw in the Word and sensed in prayer

D. One more that isn’t here but Biblical – counsel of godly people

### 2. Saw 3 characteristics of a godly leader – person God can use

A. They are a person of prayer – they go to God rather than manipulating – patiently wait upon Him

B. They are a person of the Word – they lead correctly because they think the thoughts of God

C. They are a person who deals with personal sin

1). Allow sin and the Bible becomes a closed book

2). God’s ears become closed to our prayers

3). The Spirit is grieved and you end up living life in your own power

a). You can’t lead a work of God in that spiritual state

### 3. Next week - attack