

Sunday, August 28, 2022 pm

PRINCIPLES FOR GROWTH FROM NEHEMIAH (2)

Nehemiah 4:6

Last month we presented a lesson from the book of Nehemiah where we began looking at some principles of growth. We fully understand our need to be growing, both individually and as the Lord's church here in Bellflower. Thus, from time to time, I like to present lessons associated with evangelism and church growth. T

In our last lesson we noted 4 (of 12) principles that we need can learn from the book of Nehemiah about how to get a task done. As noted, our overall goal is to remind us of some things we can do to help us growth.

The 4 principles we mentioned last month were:

- 1) We have to care – Nehemiah 1:1-4, he inquired about the well being of his brethren.
- 2) We need to pray about it – Nehemiah 1:4-11 – he was a man of prayer. In his prayer he acknowledged the greatness of God and the sins of the people, including himself in that.
- 3) We have to make plans – Nehemiah 2 finds planning takes place as Nehemiah surveyed the damage in Jerusalem, called the leaders together and motivates the leaders to lead and get the people to work.
- 4) The people get to work – Nehemiah 2:18 records, "So they said, 'Let us rise up and build.'" All the planning in the world is meaningless if we do not get to work. We emphasized our need for an active faith. Concluding with this: If we fail to work, nothing will ever get done.

Tonight, 4 more principles to consider.

I. We should ignore the critics

- a. Nehemiah 2:18-20, 4:1-3. As Israel set their minds to work, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Gesham, foreigners in their midst, began mocking them. Challenging their actions: Are they rebelling against the king? (You can't do that, it's illegal, etc.); What you are doing is worthless and won't work? (Criticizing methods and the way people are doing something).
- b. When we set out to accomplish something – either something done a new way (but still scriptural) or that has not been done in a while – prepare for critics. Critics may come from without or within (or likely both). They are different, but both become a challenge.
- c. We must NOT let critics keep us from doing what needs to be done.
 - i. Often their motives are sinister, or maybe in ignorance. But they can be discouraging and hinder what needs to be done.
 - ii. Realize that criticism is not unusual for the unfamiliar and in anything good that you are doing, especially if it involves substantial change.
 - iii. Jesus was often criticized – at times He answered and at other times He ignored it and moved on.
 - iv. 1 Corinthians 4:2-5 – Paul did not let the critics stop him. He was MORE concerned about what the Lord thought.
 - v. Sometimes the best thing we can do is put it in God's hands and do the best we can.
 - vi. Ecclesiastes 7:21-22, *Also do not take to heart everything people say, Lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known That even you have cursed others.*
- d. Note: This is not saying to ignore genuine problems (we will deal with this later), but it is telling us not to let insults and words keep us from working.

II. We need every worker working – teamwork

- a. Nehemiah 3 lists various families and individuals who got to work and where. This is one of those passages that it is easy to skim over because of the hard names and length of this list. But a careful

study of the list (which we are not doing) yields worthy observations. But some things worthy of note:

- i. They all got to work
 - ii. Some of the leaders got involved and did the work – Nehemiah 3:1 records Eliashib the High Priest with his brethren building the sheep gate. 3:18-19 district leaders got to work.
 - iii. “Next to” is recorded 16 times in Nehemiah 3:2ff. You also find the expression, “after him” several times. They were working side by side. One person did his part, the next person did the next thing they were capable of doing.
 - iv. People used their skills to do what needed to be done. Everyone has different talents, but all can do something to help the task.
 - v. Some worked in front of their own house – vs. 29.
- b. If we are to grow, we need EVERYONE doing what they are able to do.
- i. Ephesians 4:16 – speaks of every part doing its share
 - ii. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 describes us as a functioning body because every “part” has a job and is carrying that job out.
 - iii. Anytime someone is NOT doing their part, it puts an undue burden on the rest.
- c. If we desire to grow, each of us needs to be willing to do our part. This will render the greatest effect in whatever the work might be. NOTE: If enough are NOT willing, you will struggle and possibly fail.

III. **I need to work, even when others won’t**

- a. Nehemiah 3:5, while in the midst of this list of names of families working, we find some not willing to work. Vs. 5 notes that their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord. They must of have thought they were too good for the task, or they were more interested in hindering the work – more in our next lesson.
- b. The sad reality with any noble task, there are some not willing to pull their weight or do their share. They will take credit in the successes, but they will not, “lift a finger themselves”.
- c. This is especially applicable to leaders – typically, when leaders step up and start working, others will follow.
- i. In our letter, that is exactly what Nehemiah did. Furthermore, the very first one mention working is Eliashib, the high priest (3:1).
 - ii. The greatest example of this is Jesus. He was a leader who led by His example and teachings. His invitation, “Follow Me...” – Matthew 4:19, 9:9, 16:24, etc. Jesus did not let the inactivity of others keep Him from doing His work.
 - iii. NOTE: Just as when leaders lead by example (which is what scripture teaches in the church – Preachers - 1 Timothy 4:12-16, Elders - 1 Petr 5:3 – by being examples; even deacons - 1 Timothy 3:10, 13 – tested and they serve), when leaders fail to work, it is a major source of discouragement and often leads to apathy within the body. As leaders, we can never forget this!
 - iv. This was the sad reality of the Pharisees and scribes as Jesus exposed them in Matthew 23:1-4.
- d. BUT we must not forget that we are striving to please God – therefore, we need to do our work, regardless of what others do.
- i. Do not forget that God is watching each of us individually and one day we will stand before Him in judgment for ourselves – 2 Corinthians 5:10 – we will give an accounting according to what we have done.
 - ii. Consider also the parable of the talents – each was judged by what he did and did not do (Matthew 25:14-30).

IV. **Do not go looking for trouble**

- a. Nehemiah 4 finds external problems arising. Several things happen we want to notice:

- i. 1-5 – As the people continued to build the walls, they were being criticized by Tobiah and Sanballat, foreigners who were seeking to cause trouble. In this case, Nehemiah ignored them and just kept working. What he DID do was pray to God about it (4-5).
 - ii. 4:6-9 – The enemies became angry and began to conspire against Nehemiah and the people. Again Nehemiah prayed.
 - iii. 4:10-23 – The people were discouraged by the criticisms and threats, so Nehemiah took measures to strengthen the people. He armed the people, but they kept working. Because they prepared, they were not stopped.
 - iv. 6:1-14 – As the work continues and the gaps of the wall are filled in, Sanballat and Tobiah conspire again this time asking Nehemiah to come and talk with them, but they were conspiring to kill him. Nehemiah sent message and ignored them – “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it to come down to you?” (vs. 3). They kept pestering him (5 times), but Nehemiah ignored them. He prayed again to God. They tried other things – warning the people that they were “breaking the law” (which they were not) They even hired false prophets to try and get Nehemiah to compromise by entering the temple. HE was too aware and did not fall for it. AGAIN, he prays!
 - v. The work continues and is eventually finished.
- b. In these chapters, we see that as you do the work of the Lord, there is going to be opposition – both without and within. Today is no different. 2 Timothy 3:12 warns us that all who strive to live godly will suffer persecutions. What can we do about it?
- i. If it is words, don’t let it stop you from doing what needs to be done.
 - ii. Take steps to protect yourself – notice that in the account of Nehemiah, their actions were all defensive. IN THIS CASE, that was the best option.
 - 1. We are NOT talking about burying our head in the sand or doing nothing. We just simply note, we CANNOT let threats and criticism keep us from doing the right thing.
 - 2. BUT we need to be cautious – be sober and vigilant – 1 Peter 5:8. We have recently addressed alertness and soberness.
 - 3. PREPARE yourself – be ready to defend yourself – 1 Peter 3:15, cf. Ephesians 6:10-18 – we put on the armor of God. We take whatever steps we can to protect ourselves. Notice the defensive nature of our armor (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5)
 - 4. Keep praying – 1 Peter 5:7, Romans 12:19-21 – put it in God’s hands.
 - iii. BUT, in all this, do NOT go looking for a fight! Living and defending the faith is hard enough without instigating troubles. Again, Romans 12:18, *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.* Hebrews 12:14 – pursue peace with all people and holiness. See also 1 Peter 3:10-12 in a context dealing with those who seek to persecute us.
 - iv. The point in all this – KEEP WORKING!

And thus, we can see progress as Nehemiah takes steps to keep the work of rebuilding the walls going. But more importantly, we see more principles that we need to consider if we are to grow as the Lord’s church in this area. In our next lesson we will conclude this study. But for now, let me simply encourage you to examine yourself in these matters. Are you doing what you can do? Think about it!

Next lesson: Be willing to work hard, Deal with internal problems, Stay focused, Maintain the work