

Sunday, September 25, 2022 pm

Principles of Growth From Nehemiah (3)

Tonight, we continue our study from the book of Nehemiah. In this study we are addressing some principles of growth found in Nehemiah. Nehemiah is about a leader who inspires the people of Israel to rebuild Jerusalem after its walls were destroyed some 150 years earlier. In 52 days, they rebuild the walls to the city. In this study we are noting 12 principles that lead to the completion of this work. We can learn from these how to get a task done.

In parts 1 & 2 we have noted 8 of these principles: 1) We have to care; 2) We need to pray about it; 3) We have to make plans; 4) The people get to work; 5) We need to ignore the critics (there will be critics); 6) We need every worker working – teamwork; 7) I need to do my work, even when others won't; 8) Do not go looking for trouble (when you do right, trouble will find you. No need to create more). Today, our final four principles.

I. **Be willing to work hard**

- a. As we concluded our last point, we noted the efforts they made to protect themselves from the enemy – Nehemiah would allow himself to get distracted from the work, and as they build the walls, they provided protection and a way to rally wherever trouble arose. This is indeed everyone working together.
- b. Nehemiah 4:21ff – they labored in the work, from daybreak till the stars appeared. Some did the labor while others supported the work and held spears. They even stayed at night in the city so that they could get to work again the next day (and protect what they had done). They stayed prepared. Again be reminded of Nehemiah 4:6, *So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.*
- c. IF we are going to grow, not only do we need all involved doing their part, we need to be willing to work hard at it.
 - i. Jesus never promised that our work would be easy. He spoke of counting the cost – Luke 14:27-33 speaks of the cost of being a disciple. Jesus noted that we need to count the cost. Realize it is a commitment to Him.
 - ii. This is certainly true with a congregation of the Lord's people as well. If we are to grow, we have to be willing to work HARD to get done whatever it is. Sacrificing when needed, etc.
 - iii. Titus 2:14 speaks of being a people zealous for good works. Note also Titus 3:1, Remind them... *to be ready for every good work.*
 - iv. Colossians 1:10 speaks of a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him and being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.
 - v. Hebrews 10:24 – calls for us to consider one another to stir up love and good works.
 - vi. Ecclesiastes 9:10, *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.*
- d. Far too many are content to stand back and just support what is going on without putting forth necessary effort themselves. Be reminded again of Ephesians 4:16 – what causes growth of the body? Every part doing its share. Not just being a part, but actively doing what you can do.
- e. From time to time, as I examine myself – what I am doing, I need to ask, "What if everyone worked like me? What would happen to this congregation?"

II. **Deal with internal problems.**

- a. We have already addressed the external problems – critics and threats and the preparations made to head those off. Now we deal with internal issues. Sometimes these are more challenging, and always more heart breaking, because you are dealing with those who are supposed to be your brethren.

- b. Nehemiah 5:1-13 describes many people in distress. Discouraged because they were being taken advantage of by their own brethren – especially the leaders. We read that there was a famine (that likely predated the events of Nehemiah) so serious that people were mortgaging their property and even their family to survive. The leaders, who were wealthy, exploited them. This was in direct violation of the LOM in many ways – Exodus 22:22-27, and a cause of their captivity in the first place. Furthermore, in the time of Jesus we find the same exploitation – Matthew 23:14 – they devoured widows houses. Nehemiah deals with this by calling together the leaders and rebukes them and makes them return that which they had taken. He further puts them under oath that they would do it no more, warning them of God’s wrath if they did not follow through.
- c. When God created the church, it was a perfect creation. BUT, within a church there are people who are far from perfect. And some are not as virtuous as they ought to be (God will deal with such in the coming judgment). It is often (not always) those with resources and power that take advantage of others. When they do, it causes the church to suffer.
- d. As we work hard to grow, there are likely to be some personality clashes and disagreements about how to do the work or what/who is being done. It is natural, especially when challenges arise. BUT we cannot let such things keep us from working.
 - i. Galatians 5:14-15 warns us against biting and devouring one another.
 - ii. Ephesians 4:1-3 – note how in unity we are to be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”
 - iii. 2 Thessalonians 3:11-13 – Paul speaks of those not working who were busybodies. He urges them to get to work in quietness. To all he says, “Don’t give up”!
- e. We HAVE to deal with these problems! This is not something you can sweep under the carpet. This is a cancer within the body that must be dealt with to keep her holy – Ephesians 5:25-27 speaks of the pure state of the church Christ died for. 1 Corinthians 5:6, Paul warned that a little leaven, leavens the whole lump.
- f. IT is a leadership issue. When we speak of discipline, it is often dealing with troublemakers from within. Consider:
 - i. 2 Thessalonians 3:6 (note how this relates to the above text).
 - ii. 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 – the one caught in adulterous relations was to be withdrawn from in hopes that he would repent (see previous verses).
 - iii. Romans 16:17 warns us to note those who cause divisions and offenses (matters that cause others to stumble).
 - iv. Acts 15 – the church at Jerusalem (and Antioch for that matter) dealt with the troubling teachers.
- g. Problems are going to arise – understand Satan wants to stop the work. But, we deal with them and get back to work (or keep working while we deal with them if possible).

III. **Stay focused –**

- a. Nehemiah 6:1-14 finds another attempt by Sanballat and others to cause Nehemiah to fall. They sought a compromise (actually they intended to do him harm) and asked that he come speak with them. NOTE his response in 6:3, *So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”* They tried this continually (4x). The 5th time they made false accusations. Nehemiah answered them (without stopping or giving in) and kept working. Finally, they tried to entrap him by convincing him to flee to the temple (where he was not authorized to go). This too failed as Nehemiah was alert. He prayed to God and put it in His hands (6:14).
- b. As we have been noting, when doing a great work (striving to grow), there are going to be problems and distractions. The more successful you are, the more you will have to deal with. Enemies often will not quit. But you HAVE to stay focused. Keep your eye on the goal.
 - i. 1 Corinthians 9:24- run to obtain the prize.

- ii. Hebrews 12:1-2 – as you run the race with endurance, you are looking to Jesus – who is at the finished line.
 - iii. Philippians 3:12-16 – consider Paul, forget the past and “press on”; “press toward the goal for the prize...”
 - iv. Luke 10:41-42 records the account of Mary and Martha. Martha was distracted with many things. The Lord lovingly rebuked her but would not stop Mary from pursuing that which was more important.
 - c. If we are to finish a task, we must stay focused until we cross that finish line.
 - d. NOTE: It is at this point in Nehemiah 6:15-16, that we read, *So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.*
 - e. In essence, these are some steps that can help us finish a work that we need to be doing.
- IV. **Maintain the work –**
- a. While the walls were completed, the work was not done. And the truth is, whatever work is accomplished, it has to be maintained. We understand this in any endeavor
 - b. Nehemiah contains 13 chapters, 7 of which occur after the wall were completed. Nehemiah deals with more challenges: Almost immediately, friends of Tobiah are communicating with him, the city needs to be reoccupied, the law is read and the people need to restore worship. Nehemiah returns to his serving the king but returns awhile later only to find they had again drifted and were marrying foreigners. Nehemiah has to deal with all these things to maintain the city.
 - c. As Christians, we are never done with the work. Even if we have successfully reached a godly goal, we must maintain that goal and keep moving forward.
 - i. If you convert someone, you rejoice. BUT you are not done! In fact, it is only the beginning. You must continue to study and ground them – as long as it takes. Notice Matthew 28:18-20 – note the order: teach – baptize – teach (you keep teaching).
 - ii. If a church has experienced numerical growth – those who have been converted to the Lord need to be further grounded. Understand that converts from the world WILL come with “baggage”. Past moral and worldly struggles, doctrinal errors, family problems, personal problems, etc. They need to be encouraged and strengthened. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 – we warn the unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, etc.
 - iii. The fact that scripture deals with those mature in the faith implies there are others who are NOT mature in the faith. They need to be strengthened. This is why a good teaching program and sound Bible preaching are essential.
 - d. Keep examining yourself. When we come to the book of Revelation, we find it addressed to 7 churches. Of these, 5 of them had SERIOUS problems. At least 3 were in immediate danger (Ephesus, Sardis and Laodicea).
 - e. Understand, that whether we are speaking of personal growth, congregational growth, or in other endeavors, we are never done as long as we are still standing. Nehemiah concludes with Jerusalem intact, for the moment. Sadly, we know their faithfulness wavered within a short time. We cannot do that and continue to be pleasing to God. Hebrews 10:39, *But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

The book of Nehemiah is worthy of great study as we find encouragement and direction on how to accomplish a meaningful task. Let us examine what we need to get done and see if we can implement some of the principles we have addressed in this brief study. What about you? Are you ready to rise up and build? Do you have a mind to work? Think about it!