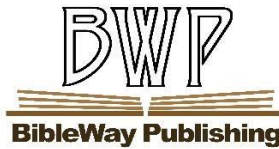


God's Rebuilding Process

Repent, Return and Rebuild

FROM IDEA TO ACTION



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FROM IDEA TO ACTION

You may never have heard the story about Hans Bablinger, a fellow who wanted to fly. The problem was he lived in 16th century Germany, and nobody was flying. But Hans was a pretty creative fellow. He was one of the first that we know of in history to fashion artificial limbs and he was doing that when amputation was the first prescription rather than the last resort.

One day Hans fashioned two wings and he went up to the top of the Bavarian Alps. He decided he would try to coast down to the plain below. He made a good choice because in the Alps there were some strong updrafts and it worked. News got all over Bavaria that Hans Bablinger had flown, and the king came to see him. When the king and his entourage came, they tried to arrange a more convenient place to let Hans show his flight so they went up just to the cliff over the river. That was a bad choice because, instead of updrafts, there were downdrafts over the river. As he dove off, he fell like a rock—straight down into the river. The king was disappointed, the bishop was mortified. The next day in church, the bishop got up and pronounced that it was never God's intent for man to fly. So, Hans threw away his wings. He died a few months later. But not long afterwards the church died. The irony of it is today it is the sight of a museum. Ninety percent of the people who go to see that museum get there by airplane.

The book of Nehemiah is the story of how God brought revival to His people through the heart of a godly and caring man. He had a vision and could see beyond what was to what was to be. Vision is an essential and vital part of spiritual life for God's people. The Proverbs say that without vision the people perish. But sadly, some people not only have no vision, but some even seek to kill what vision there is. (Proverbs 29:18)

Nehemiah didn't just have a dream. He was able to get his people to embrace his dream. I believe that God is honored when His people have dreams about things to please Him. Nehemiah had received permission, provision, and protection to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall. He arrives in Jerusalem. It's the first time he has ever been in that great city. He had prayed for four months. He'd been dreaming about this for years. What's the first thing he's going to do? Is he going to hit the ground running? Is he going to call a great meeting? Will he take out a hammer and saw and begin building right from the get-go? "I went to Jerusalem and after staying there three days, I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem." (Nehemiah 2:11-12) In three days, he doesn't do a thing. Now what's he doing during those three days? Do you suppose he's just getting some rest? Was he spending time "alone" with God?

Principle 1. A person cannot sustain in public what he is not in private.

As Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, God was still working on his heart. God was putting in his mind exactly what he needed to do now that he was there. Some Type A personality would read verse 11 and say "Nehemiah didn't do anything for the first few days." Instead, this was the most important work of all. He was making sure that he was doing what God wanted him to do. He hasn't laid a single brick, but these first few days are as valuable as any because they were spent seeking a clear confirmation from God.

"I've not told anyone what God had put on my heart for me to do for Jerusalem." You see, as Nehemiah got there and continued his prayer time, God was giving him the wisdom to do exactly what needed to be done. I think he was obeying what we read in James 1:5; "If any of you lack wisdom, just ask for it. I'll give it to you."

Remember that Nehemiah was not just in Jerusalem to build a wall so much as he is there to build a people. He was a spiritual leader, but you cannot be a spiritual leader without first being a spiritual man or woman. This generation needs to learn that busyness is not always godliness. That it is in solitude that a person receives the right to lead in public because a person cannot sustain in public what he or she is not in private.

Principle 2. Prepare well.

"I went out to examine the wall." The word "examine" was a Hebrew medical term that used to describe probing the wound. He wanted to see just how bad it was. He wanted to get a clear picture in his mind. He had heard it was bad. It was so bad that he couldn't ride his mount around the wall. I think it is at that point that the size of the project really sinks in. The whole wall is destroyed, and the gates have been burned. Seeing the scope of the work to be done, Nehemiah knows it can't be done alone.

"There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. By night, I went through the valley gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem which had been broken down, and its gates which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through. So, I went up the valley by night examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and re-entered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work." (Nehemiah 2:13-16)

Reconfirmed by his time with God, Nehemiah surveys the situation. Keep in mind that everything that Nehemiah has learned about the wall at this point, he has learned through hearsay. So, after three days he goes out in the middle of the night with a small band of men. He just wants to scout the wall without bringing undue attention to himself or his dream.

Remember Nehemiah is coming from Persia where he was the number two man in charge. He is arriving with an entourage from King Artaxerxes. Everybody knows he is coming. Opposition was beginning to swell when they just heard that Nehemiah was on his way, (At the close of this lesson we're going to see that that opposition crystallizes and it surfaces.) So, Nehemiah is getting a plan together as quietly as possible to minimize the opposition because this wise man didn't want his plan stalled in the starting gate. Great leaders protect their plans from premature death. It is easier to kill a good idea than to promote a good idea.

Principle 3. The greatest ideas are not yours or mine. They are ours •

Get involved with your people.

Once having a dream, it's critical to have a following. The wall could never be built unless the people embrace his dream. Nehemiah speaks to them. "Then I said to them, you see the trouble we are in?" These are the first words to the people who would be his followers, "Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire. Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be in disgrace." (Nehemiah 2:17) He didn't walk in there and say, "You bunch of losers. Why hasn't this wall been rebuilt? You've been here for over 90 years. You've had every opportunity in the world. I've been sent by God to get it done and I'm going to stay on your case until it's rebuilt." That's not what he said. Instead, he identified with his people and with the need. He said "We, Us, and We." Those are the most important things that Nehemiah said. "We are in disgrace, come let us rebuild the wall, and we will no longer be in disgrace." • Get the people motivated to attack the problem.

Nehemiah not only identifies with it. He motivates the people. He said, "Do you see the trouble we're in? Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire. Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and we will no longer be in disgrace." (Nehemiah 2:17) Nehemiah does a masterful job here. The wall has been in ruin now for decades and decades. People have walked by it every day of their lives and after a while they got used to it. It's not so bad. It's not so ugly. It wasn't such a big deal anymore. In fact, the people really didn't even see the dilapidated wall. Nehemiah makes them see it again. He does it by using words and phrases to stress the needs. He said that this place lies in ruins, gates burned with fire, we are in disgrace.

Change never occurs until people are discontent with the current state of affairs. That's true in your business, school, church, family and life. As long as one is content to just go along with whatever, things will never change or improve. Nehemiah said, "I want you see how bad it is." As bad as the situation was in Jerusalem, the Jews had grown apathetically content with it. Nehemiah takes off their blinders and says, "Hey, get a good look at where we are and where we need to be."

Notice the motivation he uses. The whole world was laughing, "Those poor Jews, they say they worship the true God, they can't even rebuild the wall around their city. They say their God is all-powerful, He can't even protect their holy place." When Nehemiah said we are in disgrace, it's a commentary not only toward the people, but on their God. His ultimate appeal in his little speech was appealing to the glory of God.

The greatest motivation in life is not external, it is not internal. It is eternal.

The lowest and most temporary form of motivation is external motivation, the lowest: If you will do this, I will give you this. We use that on our children, don't we? They are so immature—if you'll be good, I'll give you this. Nehemiah didn't use any external motivation.

Internal motivation is a little bit more noble. Nehemiah uses that "We are in disgrace. Doesn't that hurt your heart?" But what he is really calling on them to do is to remember their eternal motivation. He says, "The wall of Jerusalem is in

disgrace." It was no longer us but Jerusalem, "the dwelling place of God". He said, "Let's rebuild the wall for the glory of God so that God's name is not held in disgrace."

The highest motivation for you to be involved in is to do work for God, remember whatever you do, you do it as unto the Lord. Anything you say or do, you do for the glory of God and as unto the Lord. If you can keep that paramount in your mind, you will do more than you ever thought you could have done otherwise. The greatest motivation is not internal or external, it's eternal.

- Get and give a personal story or testimony

Look at verse 18: "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me, and what the king had said to me." (Nehemiah 2:18) "I heard the report about how bad things were. I prayed about it for four months. The more I prayed, the more God put it on my heart to be part of the answer. He called me to this project. He opened the door with the King, even supplying me with provision and protection." **Principle 4: People follow people, not programs.**

By themselves, programs are cold and sterile, but put people with them and suddenly you've got purpose and passion. When Martin Luther King gave his tremendous speech that changed the course of America, he didn't stand up and say, "I have a program," or "I have an organization," or "I have an agenda." If he had, we would never have heard of him. Instead, he said, "I have a dream," his own personal story, "that my children to walk hand in hand with white children in the red clay hills of Georgia." When people heard this story, they listened and they followed.

If you need volunteers for a ministry in your church, the surest way to get no takers is to get up and just announce "we have a need for volunteers to help in this ministry." It sounds so cold and so clinical, but you put a person whose heart is in that ministry in front of folks, and let that person tell why they are involved and what they get out of it, and folks will line up to help. Because people follow people, not programs.

Nehemiah stood up and said, "Let me tell you my story." The people were ready to follow. In fact, verse 18 closes, they replied, "Let us start rebuilding, so they began this good work."

"But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Gesham, the Arab, heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. What is this you are doing, they asked? Are you rebelling against the king?" Why were Sanballat, Tobiah, and Gesham opposed to Nehemiah? What was the big deal about them rebuilding the wall? Sanballat and Tobiah are war lords. They've got their own little cities and states they rule over. They've got their own little economic empire. If Jerusalem becomes a major force, particularly a major economic force, it's going to hurt their business. In another lesson we will discuss the different times opposition rears its ugly head

If Satan doesn't try to hinder your dreams, your dreams are too small. If he doesn't try to hinder you, you are not dreaming nearly enough. Part of the unwritten job description of any godly leader is the inevitability of dealing with criticism.

- a) Nehemiah considered the track record of his detractors. "I answered them by saying the God of Heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it." (Nehemiah 2:20) He asked the question: Did these men have a history of helping the people of God? Did these people have a history of wanting to support the things that God supports? When he considered the source, he became more resolved than ever to let no one stop the work except God Himself. One response to criticism of work you are doing for God is "You show us your track record. We don't have all the answers. We're doing the best we can. Are you somebody who is doing what God wants done? If so, show us how to do it. Don't tell us!"
- b) He considered the track record of his God. He knew God wanted him to have success. He had heard stories about great men of God being ridiculed, about 1) Noah having spent over a hundred years building an ark and all along the way people stood out and just laughed; 2) Moses walking into Pharaoh's court and saying "let my people go" and the giggles that must have filled that court the first day; Samson whose eyes had been put out being made sport of in a sideshow while enslaved and chained saying "Put me to where my hands can touch the pillars;" and Goliath mocking the little boy who had come out with the stones. So when these fellows ridiculed Nehemiah, he said, "Our God will give us success. He's got a track record of doing what the world says can't be done." That's the perspective that kept him from giving up on his dream.

The single greatest problem of Christ's church today is not her problems but what she thinks about her problems. Too many churches think the problems are greater than their God. That is never the case.

Principle 5: Opportunity is always accompanied by opposition

"But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost. Because a great door for effective work has been opened to me, and there are many who oppose me." Now look at that. Doesn't that sound like a contradiction? He says, "I have to stay here, why, because there's this great door opened." (1 Corinthians 16:8-9) How do you know? "There are all kinds of people who are opposing me." Most of us say, "People are opposing me. Shut the door. Let's go. Let's move out of here." Paul says he can't leave yet because God has opened a door. That is often the way it works. Whenever somebody really gets concerned about people, those who are not too concerned will get upset. Whenever somebody wants to do something, those who are doing nothing will want to throw stones. That is why we must not be quick to interpret problems and opposition to be an indication that we are outside God's Will. That has nothing to do with whether you are in or out of God's Will.

The ultimate example of those steps of putting ideas in action is found in Jesus Christ Himself. There has been no greater work, no greater movement, and no greater project than that which we call Christianity. It all started when man was created. God said, "I've already got in mind how humankind will be redeemed." (Genesis 3) So God looked at the scope of the picture. He got involved with His people by sending His own Son to take on flesh. He has motivated us to see the problem of sin in our lives. He is compelling us each day to turn to Christ as the answer. He has put people there who have strong personal testimonies like Paul—really, any Christian whose life has been changed. Then the work of Christianity has been opposed more than any other force or any other movement in the history of the world. It really follows the same pattern—anything worthwhile when you get an idea into action, will follow the format we've looked at today. Have you made the decision to commit your life to Christ? If you have not, you need to do it today. AG Lesson #1327 August 17, 1997 by Steve Flatt

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