

God's people have returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple after exile in Babylon. The temple is rebuilt; worship is rebuilt; and now Nehemiah gets a burden from the Lord to rebuild community in Israel and rebuild the wall.

It has been 160 years since Babylon destroyed Jerusalem; 92 years since the end of the exile; 72 years since the completion of the temple; 14 years since Ezra arrived in Jerusalem; 13 years between the end of Ezra and Nehemiah Chapter 1.

In Nehemiah 1, we learn six keys to rebuilding the walls of community for us today.

1. Show concern for problems around us. Nehemiah 1:1-4 Nehemiah is the cup bearer to the king, a significant role, and had influence with the king. He had all the reasons to not get involved with Jerusalem that was a long distance away. Nehemiah took on a great weight for what had happened. Are we just identifying problems today or do we show concern for community problems around us? We tend to become complacent to so much around us but there is a danger with seeing a problem and not doing anything about it. God wants people to make a difference. **I Samuel 3:11-14** God tells Eli to deal with the wrongdoing of his sons. Eli was grieved but did nothing about it and God destroyed his sons. We need to be willing to make a difference.

2. Be constant in prayer. Nehemiah 1:4-6 *Now when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. "Please, Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps the covenant and faithfulness for those who love Him and keep His commandments: let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open, to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have committed against You; I and my father's house have sinned.* Nehemiah's first place to go was a place of prayer. For us to restore community, prayer has to be a foundational part. The bigger the problem, then the harder it is to get involved and do something. Nehemiah knew it was a big problem and knew he was to start with prayer. Great leaders pray... Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Jesus...

3. Confess - stop blaming others. Nehemiah 1:6 *Confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have committed against You; I and my father's house have sinned.* Nehemiah does not exclude himself from fault. We also need to take responsibility, be humble, and willingly be responsible. **Daniel 9:4-6** *I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed, and said, "Oh, Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and faithfulness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, we have done wrong, and acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our leaders, our fathers, and all the people of the land. Ezra 9:6-7 and I said, "My God, I am ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God, for our wrongful deeds have risen above our heads, and our guilt has grown even to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt, and because of our wrongful deeds we, our kings, and our priests have been handed over to the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to open shame, as it is this day.* All three of these men are confessing the same sins for the same people and offering their humility. There is a requirement that we admit to being a part of the problem before being part of the solution. Ask God to change us first.

Luke 18:11-13 *The Pharisee stood and began praying this in regard to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, crooked, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'* But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to raise his eyes toward heaven, but was beating his chest, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' Some recognize their own guilt and others only see the guilt of those around them. Ignoring our own failures simply leads us to becoming judgmental and proud rather than compassionate and humble. Do we pray about difficult people or for these people? Desire good for people and restoration and blessings for them and not just our benefit. Paul refers to himself as the least and the chief of all sinners. How we see ourselves in relation to the problem matters when it comes to restoring people.

4. Be motivated by God's promises. Nehemiah 1:8-9 *Remember, please, the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I have chosen to have My name dwell.'* Nehemiah allowed God to break his heart, then prayed, and then goes to His Word. God gives us many, many promises in His Word. How many are we unaware of and miss? **Isaiah 41:10; Isaiah 43:3; Matthew 6:33; I John 1:8-9;** God's Word is full of promises and should be used to help us build community. Knowing God's promises motivates and strengthens us to do His will.

5. Take action. Nehemiah 1:11 *Please, Lord, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and please make Your servant successful today and grant him mercy before this man. Now I was the cupbearer to the king.* We want to talk about problems but we don't want to do anything about them. Nehemiah volunteered. Does God want to use you at the place you are at? however uncomfortable or difficult? Nehemiah knew it could result in his death but wanted to be a part of the solution. At the end of a season of prayer and fasting, he was willing. Commit to prayer - to a season of prayer.

Nehemiah stayed ready during his 4 months of waiting before God opened the door. Be faithful to pray and sacrifice. Intimacy with God grows as we seek Him in prayer and fasting. It will lead to a desire to work with God in what He is doing - to take action.

6. Have patience. Nehemiah 2:1. There were 4 months of prayer and fasting before God opened the door for Nehemiah. How often do we give up on God because we are not patient? Abraham spent 25 years waiting for a son; Moses spent 40 years in a desert before God used him; Moses spent another 40 years in a desert; David waited 12 years; Joseph faithful but years; Jesus 33 years and 40 days in a desert. How long have you carried that burden? How faithful are you to be ready when God opens the door? Community requires action not just concern. Use me, Lord! Stay ready. Be willing.

Have you become apathetic or complacent with a situation?

What have you been prayerful over and patiently waiting for God to open a door?

Has God given you a message and burden for building community in one of these steps?

Do you have a deep concern that drives you to confession and prayer for results of a willingness and action?