

Organization: *The Effectiveness of a Leader*
Nehemiah 3:1-32

Introduction: Organization is the ability to take scattered pieces and make something beautiful and useful. It creates structures that support the ultimate work, and the best of these structures are those that are never seen. It's the framing of a house, the frame of a car or the lattice of a vine. When the work or job is done, the structure is unseen but the effect is felt, shared, and realized in the strength of the finished product. Without proper organization effectiveness is limited, beauty is lacking, and overall health is nullified.

We come to a chapter in Nehemiah that at first blush seems exciting to engineers and architects only (we have an engineer in our Shepherding Group that was EXCITED about this chapter with the description of rebuilding beams and doors and repairing all the structures – which was fantastic to observe), but for most of us, this reads like a repetitious narrative of funny names and tedious recounting of a boring building project. In fact there are some who have written books on leadership and commentaries on Nehemiah and skip this chapter altogether. However, upon further study and reflection, we see some phenomenal principles emerging from the seemingly mundane. Not only do we observe a master class in organizational leadership, but we see the utter power of a unified force compelled by the same passion and goal.

Remember, Nehemiah began with this leader prayerfully appealing to God for the people of Israel living around Jerusalem and the fact that what had started so well now lay fallow. After 4-5 months of prayer, God gave an opportunity to speak to Artaxerxes, and in a bold stroke, asked for permission to travel back to Jerusalem (another 4 months), along with official paperwork and resources, in order to get the job done. When he got to Jerusalem, the situation was overwhelming. The walls were down, the gates wide open, and the people discouraged. He assessed the situation, formulated a plan, motivated the people, and set out to get it done. Nehemiah recounts the events of chapter 3, but he is conspicuously absent from the story (the Nehemiah of verse 16) is a different guy), reinforcing the idea that leadership requires humility, service, and a deflection of praise and credit. What we glean is a view of what how God sustained and preserved His people, but also how we can function well as a church, unified, organized, and unstoppable.

Purpose Behind Walls & Gates

Protection & Security

Our idea of security typically revolves around individual property or family. We have security systems on our cars and in our homes, locking our doors and making sure the windows are secure. The space is not large, but it's ours. We feel a sense of security that no one will get in when we are gone, and no one will break in when we are home. But security in the time of Nehemiah was much more corporate and collective. A walled city moved a group from a village to a stronghold, from a vulnerable group to people that should not be trifled with. There was a huge military advantage for a people to have a wall around their city, and this was one of the main reasons the nations around took notice and tried desperately to stop the building of this wall.

Identity & Distinctiveness

But there was perhaps a deeper meaning to the wall than physical security. It provided a true separation from pagan worship and influence that was pervasive, both in proximity and inundation. Every nation around them worshipped (just as everyone today worships something), but YHWH, the God of the universe, would not and does not share His glory and will not allow for any kind of syncretism.

The wall also provided a sense of **identity** for this small band in the midst of an oppressive culture. It was a declaration of a reversal from the humiliation they felt for decades, feeling the effects of defeat and destruction brought on by their own sin. The rebuilt wall assured them that God had not abandoned them, that He was still with them, and that His redemptive purpose had not been thwarted. God had declared that He would give His people rest from enemies and make **His name dwell in Jerusalem**, a place where He would be worshipped and magnified (Deut. 12:11, 21)

For us today, we do not find our identity in something external or a physical structure, but in a symbol. It is the **cross** that demonstrated God's love for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8), and "**God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us**" (Rom. 5:5). Our identity is ground in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who saved us from the wrath of God to a reconciled relationship with Him (Rom. 5:9-11). When we believe and repent of our sin, we stand forgiven through the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross. We are now Christ's, owned and indwelt by Him. Our security is that we are IN HIM, the distinctiveness is that there is salvation in no other, and we are now woke to the riches of a glorious mystery, **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory** (Col. 1:27)

Principles of Strategic Planning

Prioritization

How do you get a group of discouraged, scattered people who are not skilled in building walls (there is no one listed in chapter 3 that had "wall builder" as part of their resume)? Peter Drucker said, "*Effective executives do first things first and one thing at a time.*" The greatest priority was security, so the focus was the wall and gates. Gates were the entry ways, the potential "weak points" of the structure that could be breached. Some sections of the wall have been unearthed and were up to 8 feet wide, which would have provided a heavy defense in case of attack.

Big Picture, Small Sections

The answer to the question of "how" did he get a group of unskilled workers to build was to cut the massive project into bite size pieces. Nehemiah split the people into 40 or 41 groups of people who would work on different sections of wall and different gates. We will examine the makeup of these groups, but this plan allowed the people to "eat an elephant one bite at a time". Some sections were large (v. 13 says Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired 1500 feet of wall, which is over a quarter of a mile themselves. Others dealt with gates and smaller sections.

Efficiency Kept Enemies at bay

Because this was all organized, begun, and finished quickly, the enemies around, who had started with jeering but who would attempt physical confrontation, had no time to organize a full fledged counter attack. These are the same military tactics that allow a smaller force to overwhelm a much larger one, like the 101st Airborne recounted in *Band of Brothers*, where speed was essential. The leader of the group, Captain Winters, was able to capture a massive force of Nazi's with a small band because of surprise, organization, and decisiveness. There are times when caution is key, but when the odds are against, its often the aggressor that wins the day.

Delegation

A leader knows he/she cannot do everything, nor are they equipped to do everything, so delegation is imperative. Delegation is truly an **entrustment**, a handing over of responsibilities that allow for greater effectiveness as a whole than simply doing something alone.

Benefits of delegation

Creates a culture where people can grow – How do people grow in leadership and responsibility? They are actually given opportunities to do both. Delegation is different than abdication. It does not mean the leader washes his hands of responsibilities, but is willing to give them away and still own the results if it fails. A culture of true delegation embraces both **evaluation** and **failure**, allowing people to make mistakes, to help correct, and learn. This takes a level of **confidence** on behalf of the leader to know going in that there may be failure, but that failure is one of the best teachers we have. We want to do this around here by giving leadership of shepherding groups, of teaching, and of overseeing ministries to people who have demonstrated faithfulness, humility, and are teachable, regardless of age or whether they are staff or not.

Gives away areas that are whole and important – True delegation does not slough off menial tasks but gives away and entrusts the most important and vital. Nehemiah knew that each gate could have been breached, but still gave the repair work to many different groups. Paul entrusted what was most precious to him to others, *“what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses (the gospel which was entrusted to him) entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”* (2 Tim. 2:2)

Knows, and accepts, that some will do things differently (and maybe better) – Besides a lack of confidence, the main reason leaders do not release others in leadership is the desire to remain in **control**, which manifests in the thinking that “I can do this thing better than anyone else”. Delegation means we release people to do what is most important with the **freedom** to do it *differently* than we would. This takes a great amount of humility, since the fear of the leader is that the person may actually do it better.

Delegation requires hard work since there has to be follow up during failure, and **we’d rather control than confront**. But the advantage is that our ability to grow our forces of leaders and qualified workers grows. Nehemiah was willing to give away the work while overseeing the results, and in doing so, rallied a whole city/area to effectiveness. **NOTE** how he brought everyone together:

Involving the Whole Community

Priests (1; 17, 22, 28) – It started with the High Priest, and followed with the Levites and the other priests. These were men devoted to worship in the Temple, not to manual labor. However, true servant leadership does not hide behind roles and gifts, but provides an example to others of doing whatever needs to get done. Nehemiah started the chapter by highlighting Eliashib, because as the shepherds go, so goes the group. This is also why we are advocates that all pastors/elders/leaders here work maintenance around here at some point. Any person who is **NOT WILLING** to get their hands dirty with manual labor is most likely not fit to lead as a teacher/shepherd.

Middle Class (8, 31-32) – Notice that the goldsmiths, perfumers, and merchants worked side by side to do repair work. These were a class that had the means to pay others to do the work, or separate themselves from these laborious tasks (this was the “white collar” class). But there was a greater identity as an Israelite rather than what one did for work or business. Even city officials or rulers such as

Shallum (15) and Malchijah (14) were not above helping. Even the local police (29) and public servants pitched in. In other words, all classes and hierarchy was laid aside for a greater purpose.

Families and Women (12) – One of my favorite descriptions of repair work was done by Shallum, son of Hallohesh, a major official in Jerusalem, worked to repair the wall with his daughters. This combines both the training up of a ministry mindset of a family and understanding that daughters and women play a vital role in ministry, without whom healthy and holistic ministry CANNOT take place. As a father of daughters, this is how I want to train my girls, teaching them about ministry by *showing them how to do ministry*.

Singles (23) – At first glance, this can be missed, but Cyril Barber points out that Benjamin and Hasshub were not married (no wives or kids mentioned) and who lived in the same house¹. These were bachelors working alongside everyone else, and there was NOT a big statement made about their marital status. In other words, this was not some sort of singles ministry but simply everyone joining the work regardless of marital status. The more we emphasize our identity in Christ, the less we focus on marital status, which creates greater unity and effectiveness for everyone.

Geographic Areas (2, 5, 27) – There were groups of Israelites who had moved their families/tribes beyond Jerusalem, but even they came back to help. Delegations from Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, and Mizpah all came back to join the work. We remember that we are organized in local churches, but connected always with the larger Body of Christ, which means we are always looking to help other churches outside of ourselves, outside of Simi, and outside of the U.S.

Placed people where there were natural connections – Notice there was shrewdness in how each of these groups was placed. The priests built the Sheep Gate, the entry where lambs would enter for sacrifice and worship, which was the closest to the Temple. They had a vested interest in the strength and success of this part of the wall. Others were said to rebuild opposite their house (23), which means they worked close to where they lived. Though ministry happens wherever is needed, but it does NOT PRECLUDE the reality of stages of life. When you have kids or grandkids in children's ministry, there is a greater desire and motivation to help in that area. When you are skilled in a certain area, it is natural to serve in that area (finance, tech, teaching, care, etc.)

NOT EVERYONE was on board (v. 5) – There is an interesting and important sentence at the beginning of the chapter. Nehemiah is rightly considered a great leader, but even he could not get EVERYONE on board with the goal. *“And next to them the Tekoites repaired, **but their nobles would not stoop to serve the Lord.**”* This was a group who folded their arms as the rest of the group worked. Perhaps it was **pride** (who is this punk coming in telling us how to rebuild) or **fear** (Tekoa bordered the land of Geshem the Arab (2:19) and could have had pressure to stop). Whatever the reason there will ALWAYS be opposition to leadership and those who simply refuse to join the effort. This did not stop Nehemiah, nor did it discourage the people of Tekoa, who not only built one section that was assigned, but helped finish a **second section afterward!** (v. 27). We should never let negative people in the church discourage the efforts of the rest.

Nehemiah took no credit for the work in chapter 3 – Throughout the whole chapter, Nehemiah never mentioned himself or the role he played, even though his fingerprints were all over it. A humble, servant leader deflects credit and gives it to others. Political leaders in our day never miss an

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah*, p. 46.

opportunity to speak of their accomplishments, much like Nebuchadnezzar did in Babylon in Daniel 4:30, taking all the glory to himself. Even pastors in our culture will take credit for large churches or accomplishments that God has done through His people. Great leaders understand the power of **Proverbs 27:2**, *“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth.”* Insecure leaders have to prove their worth by pointing out what they’ve done, rather than confidently letting others get the credit and giving the glory to God alone.

Power that comes when God’s people are unified

Building a Wall vs. Building a Holy Temple

Ephesians 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a **holy temple in the Lord**.²² In him you also **are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit**.

There are several important principles we glean from this historical narrative. When a diverse group of people are focused on something greater than themselves, the most "normal" of people can accomplish some extraordinary feats. But this also illustrates our challenge. What we are building as a church is NOT something like a Temple, a structure, or a wall. In fact, it would be easier to mobilize and motivate people today if we were. What we are building is actually more important, but unseen. We are building something that has eternal dividends but cannot always be quantified temporally. God is building a holy Temple, but it is indwelling the lives of people, the Holy Spirit taking up residence in the individual lives of the church. This means that we are not after the **seen things the world values, but unseen and eternal ones** (see 2 Corinthians 4:16-18). When the world wants quantifiable, visible, and touchable success stories, we invest in people and their hearts before the Lord. This means that we cannot control the outcomes, since only God can change the heart and mind of a person. This means that the big goal and vision we are calling people to is an act of faith, a hope that God is working things out for His glory for all of eternity.

Mobilized, Equipped, Maturing, and Unstoppable

Ephesians 4:11-16 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,¹² **to equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹⁴ **so that** we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, **we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ**,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, **makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love**.

All of this means there is a dramatic paradigm shift about the mission of this church from what we naturally think. Sometimes we think about the church much like watching the SuperBowl we just watched last week: most are in the crowd watching a select group playing on the field, doing some good things and every once in a while knocking each other out! There is even a principle called the "80/20" principle in churches, where 80% of the work and giving is done by 20% of the people. This type of structure is limiting, unhealthy, and unbiblical.

Notice that Paul said that the role of pastors and teachers is to **equip the saints for the work of ministry**. Most think that we pay pastors to "do" the real work of ministry, and the rest of us support by giving or complaining (just kidding, only a few have that gift). But the Biblical role of a pastor is to prepare the saints, the believers in the church, to DO THE WORK: evangelism/discipleship, counsel, care, visitation, and service are to be done by the whole of the church. And when we are all doing that according to our gifting, the **Body grows up in every way into Christ and builds itself up in love**. Does that mean numeric growth? Absolutely, as a **result** of a healthy church functioning properly. This means that our job is to equip the hundreds of families and individuals to be mobilized for ministry. When that happens, this church will be unstoppable, since we already have the promise that the church built by Jesus will not be stopped (Matt. 16:18-19).

Our goal moving forward is to continue to shepherd, equip, and send. This is possible when we all play our roles well. We said a few years ago that we had focused on three main things: Preach the glory of God (to the glory of God) by proclaiming the gospel, equip the believers here in understanding scripture and how to live in light of it every day, and structure the church to care for itself. This has allowed us to make disciples, train leaders, and send workers for the harvest. There are two questions, then, we need to ask as we continue to walk forward: **where do we need to improve in these areas, and will you join us?**

When we all work together to the goal of glorifying God through Jesus Christ, to magnify the gospel in our own lives and proclaiming it to others, and when our mission is truly focused on making disciples, doing all of this out of love, we will be something to behold!

Jerusalem's Wall in Nehemiah's Day

