

RESOLVE TO BE INVOLVED!

We conclude our yearlong study based on texts out of our daily Bible reading program with a focus on Nehemiah. The example of resolve demonstrated during the rebuilding of the city walls of Jerusalem during his lifetime stands as an encouragement to us—to resolve as they did to get involved in kingdom work.

Nehemiah was one of the reformers of Judah who returned from Babylonian exile to help rebuild Israel as a nation. He came around 60 years (approximately 245 BC) after the first wave led by Zerubbabel and was a contemporary of the priest Ezra and the prophets Zechariah and Malachi. Persian king Artaxerxes sent him back to Jerusalem to complete the task of rebuilding the city walls, which were essential for their identity and protection.

This was a unique period in Jewish history—triumphant returns; exciting rebuilding projects; but also great disappointments and a sense of unfulfilled mission. But for his task, Nehemiah got it done and this story still informs us about the power of involvement.

A Mind to Work

Here is how Nehemiah records the work of the wall project:

So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half of its height, for the people worked with all of their heart. (4:6)

At this stage there was involved commitment by all of the people. This was occurring in the midst of local outside opposition led by Sanballat. Undeterred they pressed forward in accomplishing this task. Here are some powerful lessons we can learn from this:

- Everyone is needed. Those listed as participating in the rebuilding of the wall included goldsmiths, perfume-makers, musicians, political figures, temple servants, priests, sons and daughters—everyone! They all pitched in where and as they could. This serves as a marvelous example—the kingdom needs everyone to use their gifts to serve. No excuses! God will use our gifts now, just as he did then—to accomplish his will. This is the kind of involvement that is healthy and needed—resolve to be involved in this way!
- Take the initiative. Don't wait to be asked! Jump right in and find your place on the wall as they did. Invitations already abound throughout Scripture to use of gifts; to become involved in kingdom work; to follow Jesus. We must embrace these and engage—taking initiative to use and grow our talents.
- Overcome obstacles. There will always be obstacles. Our enemy does not want us involved. We will have our own personal Sanballats to defeat, but no one is bigger than God! He can accomplish more than we can ask or imagine, such as bringing home Jewish exiles and rebuilding a temple, walls and a city.

- Open our hearts. The key to the rebuilding was their willingness to work with all of their hearts. They invested themselves into the project. We so often go where our hearts lead us. That is why we are asked to love God with all of our hearts. If we truly open our hearts fully to the will of God, invest our total being into following him and resolve to be involved like never before the sky is the limit!

Involvement is the key to healthy growing churches and the heart is the key to involvement. Nehemiah's story clearly illustrates what committed involved people can accomplish even in the face of long odds. Of course, God was empowering them just as he promises to empower us.

The New Testament perspective is not surprisingly similar to how that wall was rebuilt:

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10, see also Romans 12:6-8)

Just as folks with different talents joined together to rebuild the wall, God continues to call upon us to use our various gifts to accomplish kingdom work. All are needed. All are valued. None are excused.

Spiritual Reform

Coupled with the amazing amount of work accomplished in rebuilding the walls was a resolution by the people for spiritual reform. The priest Ezra led the way in a reemphasis on Torah—seeking spiritual reform among the people (Nehemiah 8:18-9:2). He publically read from the Law, which convicted the people, ultimately causing them to confess sin and resolve to follow God more closely. There is no doubt that this contributed to their desire to work to complete the wall. This remains crucial for properly motivated involvement. The resolve to be involved only flows from hearts free of sin and self-centered obstacles.

On-Going Challenge

The rebuilding of Jerusalem by the hardscrabble group of returning exiles was an amazing accomplishment—spurred on by their resolve to follow God and their heart of full involvement, but this resolve would diminish. Soon Nehemiah would see the walls being exploited for personal gain and the prophets Zechariah and Malachi would address corruption even within the temple itself. The reforms of Ezra had mixed results.

Much like the resolutions we make at this time of the year, there must be something permanent behind them—a real dedication and commitment to see them through. God continues to call upon us for that kind of resolve—the forever kind that can be fed and can flourish in relationship with him. Let's resolve to be involved and give God all the room he needs to make this a lifestyle—not just a momentary occasion.

Resolve to be involved in 2019 and let's see what God has in store for us to build!