

Working Well With Others

Nehemiah 3

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Stefan Sigmund from Romania tried for many years to get his name in the Guinness Book of World Records. His final attempt went up in smoke...literally. Using a contraption that looked like an air filter for a car, Sigmund managed to smoke 800 cigarettes at one time. Only later did he discover Guinness no longer accepts these kinds of “accomplishments.”

Another time he ate 29 hard-boiled eggs in four minutes before learning Guinness quit printing gluttony records many years ago. He also jumped into a lake from a 135-foot cliff only to discover the record for diving from a fixed point had already been set at 176 feet.

Most people like to hear their name mentioned in meaningful ways. Our text for today in Nehemiah 3 contains a list of people who achieved some pretty major accomplishments. But there are not any individual records to give out because these people are involved in a team event.

Here’s our main idea: *No one can do everything but everyone can do something.*

At first glance, this chapter seems a bit dry. One commentator refers to it as a “colorless memorandum of assignments.” It reads much like the book of 1 Chronicles with its long lists of names that are difficult to pronounce, information that seems redundant, and a chronology that seems meaningless. Interestingly, Chuck Swindoll wrote a fantastic book 40 years ago on Nehemiah called, “*Hand Me Another Brick*” and he skipped chapter three! While it may be tempting to skip this chapter, it contains some great insights and principles that have direct application to our lives today.

Preliminary Observations

Let’s make a couple preliminary observations:

1. Nehemiah had an extraordinary gift of administration and organization.

He was able to mobilize and empower over 40 separate groups of people for the enormous task of rebuilding the gates and walls. He was also able to rally workers from seven cities around Jerusalem who traveled many miles to come and work on

the wall. I'm reminded of how far some of you travel to gather with God's people every weekend.

Whenever I cross over the I-74 bridge and look at the new bridge being constructed I wonder what would happen when the two sides meet in the middle, they don't line up? I'm sure that won't happen because of the amazing engineers working on the project. Nehemiah somehow knew how all the workers were going to work together to have everything line up...and for it all to be completed in 52 days!

2. People working together can accomplish more than if just one person tried to do all the work. The phrases “*next to them,*” “*next to him,*” and “*after him*” are recorded 29 times in this chapter! We first see this in verse 2: “*And next to him the men of Jericho built...*” By the way, I'm not sure I would have wanted the Jericho builders next to me since they're known more for walls falling down than for going up!

The ministry of the church belongs to everyone in the church as seen in this collage of people wearing *Grow Time* shirts. Interestingly, there are nearly 60 “one another” commands in the Bible, which shows we are part of a worldwide body of believers, made up of many members. We belong to each other and as such we must bear one another's burdens, while bearing with one another. The people were willing to cooperate and coordinate with one another for the overall cause.

Not everyone did the same job. Some worked on the walls while others grunted to get the gates repaired. Some carried heavy stone while others smoothed out the mortar.

No one can do everything but everyone can do something.

Several years ago I was out in California with my sisters and parents to celebrate my dad's 80th birthday. We spent part of a day at Muir Woods gazing at giant redwood trees. Amazingly, some of these trees are 250 feet high and are over 2,500 years old. Incredibly, their roots only go down five or six feet but can spread out 100 feet, intertwining with the roots of other redwoods. Because their roots are locked together the trees can withstand storms and rarely fall over.

As we will see in this chapter, the wall workers accomplished an incredible task because they were intertwined with each other – and in the process, they smashed a world record for teamwork.

The Purpose of the Work

It's clear the purpose of the work was the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 puts it succinctly: ***“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”***

Take a look at verse 1: ***“...and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors...”*** It's no accident the list starts at the Sheep Gate. By beginning here, Nehemiah is establishing that their relationship with God was central.

This is another way of saying, *“We're putting God and His glory first.”* Close to the wall's northeast corner, this gate provided easy access to the Temple, and was given this name because of all the sheep that entered through it to be sacrificed. Incidentally, as the Lamb of God, Jesus came in through this gate in John 5!

To ***“consecrate”*** means to, *“set apart as holy.”* Interestingly, this is the only gate that is said to be set apart. They had a time of consecration right at the beginning of the construction project. Likewise, we must make sure we're dedicated **to** God *before* we begin working **for** God. This is critical. Don't make the mistake of focusing so much on the work or the task that you forget to worship Him. God is not impressed with your labor. He wants your heart. That's why worship must always precede work.

Are you sold-out to God, completely committed and totally devoted to Him? If you are, then get ready to work. If you're not, then keep the main thing the main thing and do what 1 Peter 3:15 says, ***“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord...”***

Principles to Apply

We've looked at a couple preliminary points, we've established the purpose and now let's unpack six principles that will help us *“Work Well With Others.”*

1. Leaders must set the example. In verse 1, we see the high priest had no hesitation using his holy hands to swing a hammer or push a wheelbarrow: ***“Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the sheep gate...”*** Eliashib is the first high priest installed after the return from Babylon. And yet, here he was picking up rubble and laying brick.

I take seriously my joyful responsibility to be involved in the work of the ministry as well. While you'll never catch me in a robe and a turban, I don't have a problem getting my hands dirty. As we move ahead with our *Grow Time Initiative*, I commit to being involved with my time, my talents, my treasures, and my tools – though I may need to borrow some of yours because I don't have very many!

The **“priests”** also worked. Actually, they went over and above as we see in verse 22: **“the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired”** and in verse 28: **“Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired...”**

Our leaders have been, and will continue to set the pace here at Edgewood. Along with the staff team, the deacons and trustees are all-in with Grow Time.

Sadly, even though Eliashib started strong, his faith flamed out later according to 13:7: **“...Then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.”** Tobiah was one of Israel's archenemies and Eliashib allowed him to have an apartment in the temple!

Brothers and sisters, we must remain vigilant by watching our life and our doctrine closely. That was Paul's concern for a young church leader in 1 Timothy 4:16: **“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”**

2. God uses all kinds of people. Take a look at verse 8: **“Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.”**

People from a wide variety of different backgrounds, trades, and localities gathered to work on the wall. We see every social strata in society represented - small business owners laid brick with servants, Levites worked with laborers, rulers labored next to regular people, and farmers worked hand-in-hand with perfume makers.

God uses people from diverse places and professions for His purposes. There was an opportunity for all, and a job for everyone to do. The wall work was divided and people were assigned certain sections to work on. No one person could construct the whole wall by himself. *No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.*

I'm reminded of Ephesians 4:16: ***"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."***

BTW, have you noticed there's an elephant in the room? [**Hold up Elephant pic**]

One of our purposes as a church is to mobilize people to GIVE – it's one of our 4Gs – GATHER, GROW, GIVE and GO. This bedrock truth is based on the belief that God has gifted each of us and called us to be involved in a lifestyle of servanthood.

For many pastors, speaking about giving ranks up there with getting a root canal. Some apologize for sermons on stewardship. I don't see it that way because how we manage our dollars is a key part of our discipleship.

Having said that, we're not out to make you feel guilty or coerce you to part with some of your cash. You can relax...we've already taken the offering today!

A common misconception is that pastors are always after people's money. That reminds me of a story about two men who were shipwrecked on an island. One of them began screaming and yelling, *"We're going to die! We're going to die! There's no food or water! We're going to die!"* The second man leaned calmly against a palm tree. When the first man saw how calm his friend was, he lost it and shouted, *"Don't you understand?! We're going to die!!"* Undisturbed, the second man replied, *"You don't understand, I make \$100,000 a week."*

Dumbfounded, the first man looked at him and asked, *"What difference does that make?!? We're on an island with no food and no water!"* The second man answered, *"Relax. I make \$100,000 a week and I tithe ten percent on that \$100,000 every week. Wherever I am, my pastor will be sure to find me!"*

Let me be quick to say that I don't know what anyone gives. Your giving is between you and God.

Let me share 9 truths that are guiding me as we go through *Grow Time*.

1. While Edgewood has never focused excessively on giving, we have always taught the importance of giving.
2. Jesus spoke often about money matters. Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables are concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels,

one out of ten verses deal directly with the subject of money. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions.

3. We are going to talk unapologetically about giving but we will not use manipulation or any underhanded methods. The Bible is all about grace-giving, not guilt-giving.
4. We don't want you to give a penny more than what God wants you to give...or give a penny less than He wants you to give.
5. God will provide. He always has and He always will. Incredibly, over \$160,000 has already been given toward our facility project and we've not even asked people to give...yet.
6. In three weeks, we will be encouraging everyone to turn in a commitment card, indicating what you believe God will enable you to give for the next two years, over and above your regular giving. As we tally these commitments we'll be able to determine how much of a construction loan we will need. BTW, only our Treasurer and Financial Secretary will see these cards.
7. Our first gifts for Grow Time will be received during our Celebration Weekend December 1-2. 10% of what's given will be divided between Youth Hope to help them renovate a restroom at their Rock Island site, to the Contreras family in Fresno so they can refurbish an apartment for women who have been rescued from sex trafficking, and the final third will go to our partners in southeast Asia who are working to finish two church buildings.
8. Can I encourage you to begin praying about your participation? I know of two families who have told me they are going to *double* their giving for the next two years. Beth and I use the envelope budgeting system and this week I took the leftover money we had in our envelopes and earmarked it for *Grow Time*. Perhaps you have an asset you'd be willing to sell, or maybe you could host a garage sale or even give some stock. I think Pastor Ed is thinking about liquidating his *Beanie Babies* collection!
9. I'm praying for 100% participation. We could say it like this – *no one can give everything but everyone can give something*. We're all at different places in our generosity journey.

Giving is really a discipleship issue and a delight issue. As I trust God with my giving I'm learning how to trust him with my living. There's great joy in great generosity. Can I share my heart? If the surveys from George Barna are correct, I'm concerned that too many believers have not yet experienced the joy that comes from generous giving.

I'd like to share an illustration using this ladder that I have found quite helpful. Let's start on the bottom step and move our way up.

- **Initial Giving.** The first step for some of you is to give for the first time to Edgewood.
- **Intentional Giving.** This level includes those who make a decision to give intentionally on a regular basis.
- **Proportional Giving.** At this level you're beginning to give a percentage of your income.
- **Faithful Giving.** At this step, many of us have discovered the tremendous joy that comes from giving at least 10% of our income to the Lord.
- **Sacrificial Giving.** As you've grown in your discipleship, you know that God owns everything and therefore you are looking for ways to sacrificially give over and above your tithe.

Which level are you at? Are you willing to trust God for your next step?

As I pray for our project, I'm asking God to help us be both sacrificial and extravagant in our giving. By the way, this "Pathway of Giving" is also pictured on page 15 of the *Grow Time* booklet.

Let's go back to the wall workers...

3. Some people will not work. While most worked, some shirked their responsibility. We see this in verse 5: "***And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.***" Tekoa, a town about eleven miles from Jerusalem, was where Amos the prophet was from. While some of the people commuted to the job site; the nobles from Tekoa called in sick. Actually, the text says they refused to participate in the work of God because they didn't want to follow orders.

The phrase, "***would not stoop to serve,***" suggests that it was pride more than anything else which kept them from pitching in. Nehemiah is using agricultural imagery that describes a "stiff-necked" ox who refuses to be yoked. Jeremiah 48:10 is a stinging rebuke to those who are spiritual slackers: "***Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness.***"

In any project there are destructionists, obstructionists and constructionists.

Some time ago a football coach remarked, *“The way I see it, you have 22 men down on the field desperately needing a rest and 70,000 people in the stands, desperately needing some exercise.”* A similar situation exists in many churches today. It’s not unusual to have a small group of diligent Christian workers struggling “down on the field” while others in the congregation are more like spectators, “sitting on the sidelines, eating hot dogs and popcorn.”

4. Some do more work. In verse 5, we read the men from Tekoa finished their section of the wall, even though their nobles didn’t help out at all. Drop down to verse 27: *“After him the Tekoites repaired another section...”* Refusing to follow the bad example of their leaders, these workers went the extra mile by exceeding their allotted task. The men of Binnui did the same thing in verses 18 and 24.

Another guy named Meshullam completed one part in verse 4 and then repaired *“opposite his chamber”* in verse 30. In verse 21 we read: *“...Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired another section...”* After he finished his assignment, he worked on the wall in front of his neighbor’s house. In verse 13, Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah *“repaired a thousand cubits of the wall.”* That’s 500 yards, the equivalent of 5 football fields!

When we complete one job for the Lord, we can’t sit back and think we’ve fulfilled our ultimate responsibility as a Christian. Edgewood, as long as there is work to be done in God’s kingdom, there’s work for us to do. In Matthew 5:47, Jesus addresses each of us when He asks this question, *“...what more are you doing than others?”* Brothers and sisters, what are you doing more than others?

5. Some work with passion. In the New American Standard and in the NIV, verse 20 reads like this: *“Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section...”* The King James says he *“earnestly repaired.”* The Hebrew means *“to burn or glow”* and suggests that Baruch burned a lot of energy. He was not just serving; he was on “fire.” Everyone was working hard, but in a crowd of committed construction workers, Baruch stood out from the rest.

A quote attributed to John Wesley may not have actually been said by him but is powerful nonetheless: *“Set yourself on fire and people will come for miles to watch you burn.”* Romans 12:11: *“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”*

I spotted Baruch at Edgewood this week. Actually, he’s here a lot. Nels Lindell serves as one of our trustees. When I saw him on Wednesday, he had just finished

setting up tables for Awana and had a vacuum with him that he had taken to get repaired. He told me he often swings by the building during the day to see what help is needed. When I asked him about the secret of serving he said, *“I try to serve enthusiastically and I desire for others to do the same.”*

Anyone else want to be like Baruch? Are you willing to go the extra mile and burn with zeal and passion in your service? Are you tired of just going through the motions? Are you ready to get fired up and work? If the truth were known, most of us could do a lot more, with a lot more passion, than what we’re doing right now.

I read a story this week that made me feel a bit nauseous. Here’s the headline: *“South Carolina officials warn about ‘flushable’ wipes after sending divers into ‘raw sewage.’”* Here’s part of the story: *“Officials with the Charleston Water System...were caught in a smelly situation last week. They had to send scuba divers roughly 80 to 90 feet down into ‘raw sewage’ to clear heaping piles of wipes that clogged the system...”* One man asked, *“How many showers would one have to take to feel clean after this mission? The folks who carried this out are remarkably dedicated.”*

In Nehemiah’s day, one guy was remarkably dedicated and stepped up to do a smelly job that no one else wanted. Look at verse 14: ***“Malchijah, the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate.”*** According to Jeremiah 35, the Rechabites stand out for being above reproach, for abstaining from alcohol, and were known for their unflinching obedience.

Even though he’s the son of a ruler, Malchijah is cleaning the latrines and repairing the sewage system. I’m sure there was a wonderful “perfume” that went along with this job because this is where all the refuse was taken out of the city. If this is the same man mentioned in verse 31, he was a goldsmith by trade and had already helped out with repairs on another part of the wall.

Some of us need to take some trash out. We’re allowing it to pile up and it’s starting to stink. 2 Corinthians 7:1 tells us we must refuse to let refuse pollute our lives: ***“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”***

6. Some work as families. The final principle from this passage is that some worked as families – either on a section in front of their home or next to their

home. At least six different workers, plus an unknown number of priests, repaired the portions of the wall that were nearest to their own houses.

Here's just a sample. In verse 10, Jedaiah repaired ***“opposite his house”*** and in verse 23 a man named Azariah, who was likely single, ***“repaired beside his own house.”***

This no doubt guaranteed that these sections of the walls would be sturdy because families want to be protected. By the way, the family is under attack today so we must do all we can to protect and provide. We must teach sacrifice and service and self-control to our kids and grandkids as Proverbs 25:28 says: ***“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”***

The Lord calls us to serve in areas right in front of us and with people who are often closest to us. If we would follow this example, our neighborhoods would look differently. Brothers and sisters, look at your neighbors as your mission field. Befriend them. Serve them. Pray for them. God has purposely placed each of us where we are for His purposes.

In verse 3, the Fish Gate was rebuilt by the *sons* of Hassenah and in verse 12, the *daughters* of Shallum worked on the wall. In verse 30 we read that ***“Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section.”*** I wonder why his five older brothers are not mentioned. You may be the only one in your family committed to kingdom work.

As a church we are committed to make an impact in our communities, in our counties, in our country, and on the continents. We go from our neighbors to the nations. But, we must first begin at home.

No one can do everything but everyone can do something.

I love this time of year when the geese start making their way south. One of the fascinating things about geese is that they normally fly in a V-formation. Have you ever noticed that one side of the “V” is usually longer than the other side? Do you know why that is? *It's because there are more geese on that side!*

Geese often cover thousands of miles before reaching their destination – and they can only get to where they're headed if they work together. Here are some facts about their flight patterns:

- By flying as they do, the members of the flock create an upward air current for one another. By flying in a V-formation, the whole flock gets 71% greater flying range than if each goose flew alone. When we work together we'll be lifted by the energy of others and get to where we're headed much quicker.
- When one goose gets sick or wounded, two fall out of formation and follow it to the ground to protect it. They stay with the struggler until he's able to fly again. We're called not to just work together but also to care for one another.
- The geese in the rear of the formation are the ones who do most of the honking. It's their way of announcing that they're following and everything's going well. The repeated honks encourage those in front to stay at it. Honking also helps them know where each other is so they don't lose anyone. It's important for us to keep each other encouraged, especially those who are tackling the winds out front.

It's the natural instinct of geese to work together. Whether it's flapping, helping, or simply honking, the flock is in it together...which enables them to accomplish what they set out to do.

One lesson from this chapter is God loves writing down names of servants who serve in sacrificial ways.

What time is it? *It's Grow Time!* God is looking for willing workers who will give what they've been given.

One of the best ways to embrace this long list of long-forgotten people with unpronounceable names is to see them as our relatives – our aunts and uncles, our moms and dads, our grandparents. They grew in faith, they grew as a family of believers and they left a legacy for the future.

Those who came before us served and sacrificed in order to build this building. And we now have an opportunity to leave a legacy of faith for those who come after us.

Before passing on, let's make sure we pass it on by leaving a legacy.

If we do, it will be one for the record books!

We're going to close with a new song called, "Pass it On."

Closing Song: Pass it On

*Ev'ry generation they will tell their children
Of Your awesome power and Your mighty acts
They will tell the stories
Of Your faithfulness and glory
And we will pass it on to all who've yet to come
Giving You glory honor blessing and praise
Together we'll pass it on the greatness of Your ways*