

Prayer School Insert!

Alexis Muscarella: The Good Work

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

#TheProblem: Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hananai, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who survived is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.” As soon as I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of Heaven.

Principle 1: The beginning of all good work comes from the willingness of believers to carry the burden.

This is the starting point for all great advances in the Kingdom of God.

- Recognize the problem
 - The remnant is in great trouble
 - The wall is broken down
 - The gates have been destroyed by fire
- Pick up the burden
 - Are we willing to bear the weight
 - Are we willing to be affected to the point of response

#ThePrayer: And I said, “Oh Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes be open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father’s house have sinned. We have acted corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules you gave to your servant Moses. Remember the word that 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 your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.” They are your servants and your people, who you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayers of your servants who delight to hear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” Now I was cupbearer to the King.

Principle 2: The foundation for all good work is laid as we spend time conferencing with God.

Nehemiah knew that he had to do something about the burden in his heart, and he knew that it would only be done as he spent time conferencing with God.

- For four months he fasted and prayed in preparation to approach the King whenever the Lord would open the door.
- As he prayed, he stood in the gap for his nation. He placed himself between God and the situation.
- His proclamation of the promise of God was not a matter of informing God of something God had forgotten, but rather positioning his heart for what was coming next.

- After four months, he began the transition from his time of intercession into a time of action. The Lord already had him perfectly positioned; now he just needed to open his mouth and speak on behalf of the people of God the moment the Lord opened the door.

#ThePetition: In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took the wine and gave it to the King. Now I had not been sad in his presence. And the King said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. I said to the King, “Let the King live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins and the gates have been destroyed by fire?” Then the King said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven and I said to the King, “If it pleases the King and your servant has found favor in your sight, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.” And the King said to me (with the Queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone and when will you return?” So it pleased the King to send me when I had given a time. And I said to the King, “If it pleases the King, let letters be given me to the governors of the province beyond the river that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to the keeper of the King’s forest, that he may give me timber to rebuild the gates of the fortress of the temple, the walls of the city, and the house I shall occupy.” And the king granted my request for the good hand of God was upon me.

Principle 3: God alone can open the doors and pave the way for the fruition of the good work.

Four months of prayer and fasting led up to this one critical moment with the King. There are four main things to pull out of Nehemiah’s petition before the King.

- The King could see weight of the burden Nehemiah was carrying and it could have cost him his life.
- Nehemiah approached his petition from a place of prayer
- Nehemiah was willing to ask for more
- God used the King to place the resources in Nehemiah’s hand... A king who had previously stopped the work on the Temple

#ThePrognosis: So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King’s Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. Then I went up by night into the valley and inspected the wall, and I returned through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work. Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in. How Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

Principle 4: God allows and longs for his people to take part in the ownership of the good work.

Nehemiah went out alone to examine that about which he had heard.

- Up until this point, Jerusalem being broken down was something he had heard about, but not seen. This was the chance for him to experience it for himself, to get alone with the Lord, and to ponder what God had put on his heart to do.

There is value in not sharing the vision until the appointed time.

- Why did Nehemiah wait to tell the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and everyone else who was going to be doing the work?

Taking ownership of the good work involves being able to cast the vision at the appointed time, but it also involves strengthening your hands, rising up, and building when the vision for the good work has been cast by a fellow believer. There is power in teaming up to work toward the vision on the heart of God.

As believers, the always-ready cry of our hearts should be “let us rise up and build.” God, whatever you want me to do, I’ll do that. Whatever part you want me to play, let me play that part... And then we must strengthen our hands for the good work.

#TheProcess: Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the sheep gate... And next to him the men of Jericho built... and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built...
Nehemiah 3:1-32

Principle 5: The Good Work happens when men and women from all walks of life come together and contribute what they have to the Kingdom

Some of the people working on the wall weren’t even Jews. Some could have considered themselves unqualified- most of them weren’t builders by trade
There were some who considered themselves overly-qualified

#ThePushback: Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!” Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders. So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. In Judah it was said, “The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.” And our enemies said, “They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.” At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.” So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

Principle 6: As the people of God do the good work, there will always be opposition from the enemy

People will almost always question the work God has called you to do.

- In this case, Sanballot and Tobiah turned to ridicule to tear down the confidence that Nehemiah and the builders had in what God had called them to do.
- People in Judah were even talking back and forth to one another saying that the strength of those doing the good work was failing.
- Ten times their own people the Jews asked them to give up on the work and return home.

Nehemiah had the perfect response to the opposition. Instead of defending what God had asked him to do, he turned to the Lord and said, “God, will you take care of this for me?” And then he turned to the people and said “Remember the Lord. Stand and fight.”

#ThePrincipleofthePlow: When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. I also said to the people at that time, “Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.” So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

Principle 7: Until the good work is completed, we must labor and fight without relenting.

The men always played a double role. They stood as both guard and laborer until the work was complete. If and when the enemy would come, a call would go out, and the men would rally together to fight to protect the wall, even if it wasn't their portion. Neither Nehemiah nor the guard nor anyone working on the wall called for a hiatus. No one took a vacation from the work. But they continued to strengthen their hands day in and day out until it was completed.

Luke 9:62 If anyone puts his hand to the plow and then looks back, he is not fit for the kingdom of God.