

# *Leave a Legacy: Nehemiah's Formula*

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About 446 BC a Jew named Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king of Persia. This was a trusted position for him to hold because he was to protect the king's food and drink from poisoning. One day while working in the palace a group of men from Judah came to visit him. Nehemiah asked them about the Jews who had left captivity and returned to their homeland of Jerusalem.

The men began to paint a picture for Nehemiah of the affliction and reproach the returning Jews were under. "The wall of Jerusalem is broken down," they said. "And the gates thereof are burned with fire." (Nehemiah 1:3) The Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in about 586 BC left their homeland in rubble. After being carried off to Babylon for 70 years, the Jews returned under Persian King Cyrus who enabled them to rebuild their temple. They had expended every effort to rebuild the temple of Solomon from the foundation up, and succeeded. But it appears the rest of their city still showed signs of captivity and death.

Being constantly surrounded by a visual reminder of their oppression and bondage did little to improve the Jews' spirit. The words used to describe the people were "afflicted" and under "reproach." Imagine how you'd feel in a burned out city, its walls crumbled and buildings still in ruins from a massive attack by a foreign power. Emotions like despair, despondency and hopelessness come to mind. The state of Jerusalem's wall and gate is a vivid illustration of how our external environment affects our internal state of mind and our resulting actions.

Upon hearing this dismal tale, Nehemiah "*sat down and wept, and mourned for days and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven*" (Nehemiah 1:4). His prayer is recorded in the remainder of chapter 1. He prayed for his people and he acknowledged before God his own sins and the sins of his people which led them to destruction in the first place. They had intermarried with foreigners and forsook God to worship their spouses' false gods.

## **Have True Concern for Others and a Desire to Help Them**

So here Nehemiah sat praying and fasting for days, calling upon God and reminding Him of His promises to gather Israel once more. His heart was completely drawn out toward God and his people. Nehemiah focused on others. He wasn't selfishly thinking of himself. He thought about other people and their needs. This is the first step toward leaving a legacy: feel and sense the pain of others and have a desire to comfort and support them.

## **Fast, Pray and Repent**

Nehemiah fasted and prayed for himself and especially for his people. He repented of his own sins -- making him a pure receptacle for truth and enlightenment and enabling him to be a righteous instrument in God's hands. When we put in that kind of "work" to seek God's face and His will, we clear our channels for revelation. Somewhere between Nehemiah chapters 1 and 2, Nehemiah got the idea to rebuild the wall and gates of Jerusalem. He pictured in his mind the Jews restored to their homeland so they could be a nation again.

## **Identify the Problem and the Possibilities**

Notice that Nehemiah was in the unique position of being outside the rubble. He lived in the palace of the king. He knew the possibilities for beauty and order. He knew things didn't have to be chaotic and desolate. From his outside perspective, it was easier for him to have a vision of a restored Israel. Sometimes it takes spending time in a place of beauty and order so that when we come back to our day-to-day lives we can clearly see what we've been tolerating. Sometimes it takes a friend on the outside to help us see that things don't have to be the way they are.

## **Share Your Idea**

As Nehemiah returned to work in the palace, the king noticed how sad Nehemiah was. He knew he wasn't sick, but he was concerned for his servant's state of mind. At first Nehemiah was afraid of disappointing the king. He was afraid to ask for time off to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city wall. But the king pressed him to share what was on his mind. So Nehemiah said, *"Why should not my countenance be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchers lies in waste, and the gates thereof are consumed by fire?"* (Nehemiah 2:3)

The king replied, *"For what dost thou make request?"* This king was a friend to Nehemiah. He was concerned for him and wanted to help. So Nehemiah said a quick prayer to God and made his request to return to Judah and rebuild the land of his fathers. Not only did the king grant him leave, but also gave him letters that enabled Nehemiah to pass by any gatekeepers on his journey. The king even provided timber and supplies for rebuilding the gates and wall!

Had Nehemiah been too scared to share his idea with the king, he never could have accomplished his goal. Many of us break down at this step of the process. We might be afraid someone else will steal our idea and take credit for it. Or maybe we're afraid they'll make fun of us or tell us we can't do it. You have to share your ideas to make them happen. God has structured this world such that we need each other to

accomplish great things. You simply must open your mouth and share your big ideas with key people you trust. Otherwise you may never get it done.

### **Act, Act, and Keep on Acting**

Nehemiah set off for the city of Jerusalem, walked into town, and in an inspiring speech enlisted citizens to help him rebuild the city wall and gates: "*Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.*" Then he told them how good God had been to him and how the king had helped. "*Let us rise up, and build!*" he said. In response, the people "*strengthened their hands for this good work*" (Nehemiah 2:17-18).

### **Stick to Your Purpose and Your Vision**

Almost immediately, people came to laugh at him and accused him of wanting to rebuild the city wall so that he could rebel against the king and set himself up as king.

Nehemiah ignored the scoffers and continued. As things progressed, his enemies did various things to try to stop the work. They claimed the king was onto him and was coming after him to punish him. They brought him false prophesies of people out to kill him and suggested he hide in the temple for protection. Nehemiah refused to listen to them. He would not succumb to fear.

They tried to distract him by sending him letters asking him to leave the wall and come speak with them about what he was doing. For Nehemiah the time for talking had ended. It was time to act and keep on acting. He and his men watched continually against their enemies but kept on working. In the end, Nehemiah finished the wall and gates and served as governor of Judah for twelve years.

If we wish to make a difference in the world -- if we wish to live a life of joy, purpose and passion -- we too must follow the steps that Nehemiah followed. Nehemiah went down in history as more than a man who built a wall. He was a man who inspired the Jews to rise up from the ashes and live in hope. His wall is a perfect example of how our outward environments affect our inward state of mind. More importantly his wall is a symbol of every broken life, every soul in bondage, who turns to the Savior of the world and through repentance finds life instead of death, freedom instead of captivity, and hope instead of desolation.

## Challenge

Look around you for people in need. Pray to God for those you have a heart to help. Ask Him how you can be of service. Repent where necessary and allow yourself to be God's chosen vessel worthy of His enlightenment and guidance. When your inspired idea comes, share it with those you trust and enlist their aid in the journey. Nehemiah couldn't do it alone and neither can you. God has placed within your circle people who can make your vision a reality. Trust Him to provide those people and then walk forward in faith. Stick to your purpose and your vision and act, act, and keep on acting no matter what opposition or potential distractions may come.

If you will do this, I promise you a life of passion, happiness and joy!