

MORNING STAR

MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

presents
VBS 2022



INTRODUCTION

In December of 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China; people began to experience shortness of breath & fever. Soon this experience would impact the entire earth. It was the beginning of COVID-19, a worldwide pandemic that would kill millions of people.

No one could have predicted its impact upon the institutions of the world, especially upon the church. As businesses were ordered to close and people were encouraged to wear masks, fears grew amid a rush to find a vaccine.

When it came to the church there was both compliance and opposition. Some churches obeyed their government and shut their doors to protect their members, while others in defiance of government interference with religious institutions refused to shut their doors. Were we right to shut our doors, or were we wrong?

The churches that closed their doors were standing on the Word of God. The Bible tells us,

*¹ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. ² Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. **Romans 13:1-2 (KJV)***

This verse is what tells us as believers that we are to obey our governing authorities. This refers to both the church and the world. The pastor of the church, the police officer that pulls you over, the teacher in your classroom, the magistrate of the court, the mayor of the city, the governor of the state, the

leader of the country, all are in positions of authority and God's will is that we submit ourselves to the higher powers (*provided they do not tell us to do something that goes directly against the Word of God*). As for churches that refused, many lost members and pastors to this plague, while others experienced no hardship whatsoever for refusing to obey their governing authority.

Our problem is that today it is more exciting to cast off restraint and to resist being told what we can and cannot do! This same mentality has permeated the church and is transforming worship and ministry in ways that God never intended. Why have we begun to cast off restraint? The Bible has an answer for that.

Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law. Proverbs 29:18 (NIV)

The church was once the moral center of every city and town, but now it has been removed from the center of town and pushed to the outskirts along with its beliefs and purpose. But Proverbs 29:18 said specifically, "*where there is no revelation...*" So, what is meant by "revelation"? The King James Version translates that word as "vision".

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)

The word vision means that every individual can clearly see where the church is headed, and where God is leading us. But it is also worth noting at this point that it is not productive to begin saying to oneself, "But we are not under

the Law”, and then disregard whatever has been said. While it is true that we are under grace, the law is still necessary to lead us to grace. We need to know that we **MUST** be converted or born again! The Bible says, born again not of the flesh; but of the Spirit. And can you guess what is perfect at converting the soul?

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. Psalm 19:7 (KJV)

Yes, you heard that right! It is the Law. What law? The Law is more than just the Ten Commandments. The Law is contained in the first five books of the Bible. The Law convicts us of our sins and helps us to realize our need for His grace. Do you remember what the Bible says about us being saved?

⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (KJV)

When we have cast off restraint, when we refuse to let anybody teach us about God’s Word and how God wants us to live, we will feel we have no need for Him, His Word, nor His grace in our life! And we have no desire to go to Bible Study, Sunday School, or church services. We will even give our parents attitude when they tell us to get up and get ready for church. When we act like this, we’re already telling God we have no need of Him in our life. The church, the Word of God, the choir, the preacher, and all that stuff is just **NOT** important to “me”.

How many parents pray for their children to be saved? How many children have already decided that when they get out the house to live on their own, they

will **NEVER** go to church again? What is the message **YOU** have learned about going to church? The only one who will be happy about you not going to church is the devil.

So how does God get us back to the church? Will it take another school shooting only this time it happens at your school and you are the one being shot at? Because as bad as some teenagers **THINK** they are, once it's their life in somebody else's hands, everything becomes very different. And while some teenagers will "act" tough for their reputation's sake, how do you "act" tough when the villain is cancer, or some debilitating disease, or COVID?

Was COVID a wakeup call for all of humanity? It affected everyone. At first the health experts thought children were in no danger but look at it now! Why would God allow this to happen if He is supposed to be so loving? WAIT A MINUTE! Let's flip the script! Do **YOU** love God? Then why don't **YOU** keep His commandments?

*If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. **John 14:15 (MSG)***

What we **REALLY** want is for God to show **US** that He loves **US** by doing whatever **WE ASK HIM** to do! And to be perfectly honest, there is a way for you to have that, but the requirement for it is where we so often fail! Here is the requirement in summary, "We **MUST** be saved, we **MUST** walk with Him allowing Him to direct our paths, we **MUST ALWAYS** obey Him, and we **MUST** ask in faith believing we will receive, and we **CANNOT** ask amiss that we may consume what we get on ourselves." Do that and you got it! But fail in any part and you will have none of it!

After the churches were able to reopen, we ran into a new problem.

A lot of people did not return to church. Now they have church via Social Media. Any teenager who didn't like going to church was happier now if their parents decided they are not going back yet, or ever again. But here's a good question for you to consider, could God be weening out His church of those who really didn't want to be there? Is He preparing for the rapture when He will take those who are saved away with Him? No, because there is yet prophecy to be revealed. But I ask the questions because now is the time for the people of God to REBUILD!

We need to take our ministries apart and put them back together, examining what worked and fixing what is not! I believe we have been blessed to have the opportunity to build new ministries and make things better for the church than before! I believe if we go back to the way things were, we will have missed a golden opportunity! Our focus needs to be on helping the teenagers within our community and getting community involvement so that other teenagers will be compelled to come and join in the work, increasing our reach and our effectiveness. We must have an open mind, not to change the Word, but to grow our understanding of the Word and its far-reaching implications. We want the church to become like the church in the book of Acts, where all people had all things in common. Do you believe it can be done? I do!

QUESTIONS:

1. How do you believe COVID has affected the church and you?
2. Do you believe there is a need to rebuild here at Morning Star?
3. How should we handle a ministry that still tries to operate under the principle, "This is **"MY"** ministry, and **"I"** am in charge!"?
4. If the church belongs to God as well as the people, do the ministries of the church also belong to God?

LESSON 1

What do You Mean, Rebuild?

When we are introduced to Nehemiah, he is living and working at the palace of King Artaxerxes as the king's cupbearer. He is visited by one of his brethren Hanani who is accompanied by certain men from Judah. When he inquired of the state of the Jews who had come back to Jerusalem from captivity and of the state of the city itself, the answer caused him to sit down and weep. He then mourned certain days, fasted, and prayed to God.

What broke his heart was how he saw God in relation to the things of God. He knew God is awesome and anything that bears His name or is of any relation to Him should also be awesome. But Jerusalem was in ruin, and the people who were there were suffering, and this broke Nehemiah's heart.

In similarity to Nehemiah's heart, our hearts ought to be afflicted by the current state of the church today. So many churches are struggling in a bad way to keep teenagers involved and facing the possibility of losing their youth ministry. And while some will sit back and say to themselves, "God is not going to let His church fail!", please wake up and realize who He has left to care for His church! He has not appointed cherubim to clean the church, repair any broken instruments, to pay the bills and restock needed supplies, so that you can just come on Sunday and all things are decent and in working order and to your liking. He left His church in all our hands to supply and to do all things necessary.

Many cannot begin to understand the depth of the peril when 80% of the church has been supported by 20% of the people. But now that COVID has ravaged the earth, the 80/20 is more like 85/15 to 90/10! Do we care? Are we

concerned? Are our hearts not stirred like Nehemiah's?

Morning Star used to have youth ushers. We would have 7 ushers on the floor on Sundays using hand signals to communicate. Guess how many teenage ushers we have in training now?! We had 5 choirs and now we have 2 with dwindling numbers! While it's true many have grown up, moved away, or relocated, the church must go on! We became so used to others doing things for us and making sure things were proper and in place until now we don't remember how to do certain things, or we never learned.

That's why **NOW** is the time to rebuild! That's why **NOW** is the time to be trained and to join in and to help! What is it we need to do? We need to rebuild the wall that is Morning Star! Only this time we build it better! This is not our friend's church, or our neighbor's church, this is **OUR OWN** and she needs us **ALL** to help.

Nehemiah spent a lot of time in prayer before acting which is one reason why the Hour of Power ministry has been brought back. How do you think it would look to God if teenagers showed up to pray for 1 hour **EVERY** Sunday morning? Some are already saying, "I can't pray for a whole hour!", but you will never know until you try. Once you get into it, you will discover that an hour is not enough time because there is so much to pray for. And we will help you to know the things to pray for. Ok pastor, but pray for one hour? Yes! The Bible says...

...for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.

Isaiah 56:7 (KJV)

How do we do this you might ask? Nehemiah first repented of his own sins and then he acted as an intercessor for the sins of Israel, confessing and repented

for the people he cared so much about. He also prayed about a way to do something about the situation and for the favor of God before the king. Like Nehemiah we to can pray for the people to return as well as for God to send us new members. We can pray for more deacons, more trustees, more choir members, etc. for every ministry of the church. But here's the catch! If God answers us and they come to the same old things as before, do you think they will stay or will they leave?

One problem I saw with the youth ministry was the lack of input from the youth. So, I approached the youth one day and asked them if they would like to go on a retreat? One where they could get away rom the church and spend the night at a retreat facility and have some fun along with some class time for instruction. The response was an overwhelming YES! And Morning Star made sure money was put in place in the budget for the youth to have a retreat.

Later that year, a meeting was being held as the adults planned the retreat when suddenly a knock came on my office door. The person entering was from the meeting and had come to tell me that **THEY** decided they were not going to do a retreat (*mind you as the youth had requested and the church had approved*). So, I responded by saying, "Ok", and asked the person who brought me the news to go back and let everyone in the meeting know that I would be calling a church meeting to take the money back out of the budget that had been placed there to support a youth retreat. Three minutes later there was another knock at my door where the same person stuck their head in to inform me that the youth retreat was back on!

I was fighting for the youth of the church and what they said they wanted! Someone else evidently felt they knew better what the youth wanted, and in their opinion, it was not a retreat! I shared this to say the youth ought to have input

into what their ministry will do! Otherwise, they will lose interest and not want to participate.

We must be careful of ministry members who believe and act like **THEY** alone are the boss of their ministry. There is only one head of the church, and His name is Jesus! And beneath Him is the under-shepherd of the church who holds the title of Pastor. We all (including the pastor) are at best stewards with specific roles, but there is only one in charge, and He does not behave like us! Halleluiah!

If I am the president of any auxiliary of the church, then I am the leading **SERVANT** of that auxiliary and I need to set the example of service for that ministry. That's why you may see your pastor with a broom sweeping or carrying a bag of trash to the trash can or pulling the trash cans in from the street and putting them back where they belong. Because I am the pastor does not mean I am above doing these things, it means I am the leading SERVANT of the church and must set the example. There may come a day when I am unable to do these things and need the assistance of others, but until then I must be an example of the believers.

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

1 Timothy 4:12 (KJV)

Rebuilding starts in all our hearts and evidence is shown in our hands and our feet and our giving. And remember our giving includes our time, our talent, and our tithe.

It's time we sit down and take an inventory of our respective ministries. We need to question everything. What is our purpose? How are we fulfilling our

purpose? Are we growing or are we shrinking? What standards have we set and are we keeping them? Do we all get along? Is there any quarrelling within or over how or when or where we do things? Ask for input from other members who are not a part of your ministry but who may have an excellent idea that no one else thought of or considered.

This is just a starting point for each ministry, but we must ask the tough questions and receive the tough answers. Otherwise, we will fail our God and our church family. Once we have our ministry rules laid out, we need to follow them. We can begin by following Nehemiah's example.

1. He began with himself and getting his heart and his soul right with God.
2. He prayed for God's direction and favor.
3. He went before the king for permission as well as resources.
4. He journeyed to Jerusalem with all his accompaniment.
5. He surveyed the problem and then prayed for 3 days.
6. He made one speech to the people and God knitted their hearts together.
7. The work began! (And so did their problems!)

Nehemiah faced opposition because the devil did not like what God was doing through him. You too can expect opposition at some point along the way **IF** you are doing the will of God. Don't fear it, embrace it with joy, because God's going to grow your faith, and prove His promise which says...

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. 1 John 4:4 (KJV)

LESSON 2

Working With Rubble

When Nehemiah surveyed the Walls of Jerusalem, he found the walls torn down and the gates thereof burned with fire. These were the materials Nehemiah had to work with, beside the timber from the king's forest that king Artaxerxes had given to Nehemiah to use in rebuilding the wall. Can you imagine trying to build a wall with rubble? Can you imagine trying to build a youth ministry with rubble? If we go back to building the way things were built before, we can expect the same results as before. If the adults sit down without any youth involvement, we can expect the same results. But if the adults ask the youth to come out and participate, then it's vital that the youth show up and participate. But the fact is only a few MIGHT show up, and all they are left to work with is rubble. The youth ministry will be what the youth make it! No more nor no less! It's not that the teenagers have all the say so, but that everyone has a voice. Obviously we can't do things like take a flight on Elon Musk's Rocketship into space, but there are things we can work on doing. The question is are **YOU** willing to help? Because the wall must be rebuilt.

We must begin by asking the question, "What is meant by rubble?" According to the website dictionary.com, rubble is broken bits and pieces of anything, as that which is demolished. The church is not brick and mortar and wood and cement, it's flesh and blood. But how is it then that we as people can be considered as rubble? Do you remember the centurion whose daughter had died in the Bible? Let's take a look at something he said as well as something Paul said that I believe will help us to understand.

*The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof... **Matthew 8:8a (KJV)***

*For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. **1 Corinthians 15:9 (NIV)***

The centurion was a soldier with command. He did not profess himself to be a deeply religious man, but as a soldier he had killed other men in battle. He knew where he stood in relation to God and the things he should and should not do. He knew he was a sinner.

As for Paul, he used to persecute Christians and put them in jail. He knew he was wrong for doing so and therefore also knew that he was a sinner.

The point I am trying to make is that all of us are broken because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Therefore, the church is comprised of broken people, and **WE ALL** are as the rubble Nehemiah and the Jews had to build with. Torn down by the world and scattered by the storms of life, but they took what they had and built! **And so shall we!** So don't count yourself out, count yourself in!

A lot of times we write things off because we don't believe in it, or we don't believe a certain person is capable, or we don't like this person or that one. We are setting ourselves up for failure whenever we doubt the ability of God! The work necessary to build the wall would demonstrate their faith in God. They needed to believe in order to start the work and remain faithful to the end to complete the work. Granted it was no small task but imagine how inspired they were by seeing how quickly the wall came together as everyone worked beside each other, and others were pitching in elsewhere when their part was complete!

We must also have that kind of faith! Faith to start the process and faith to see it through to completion. Therefore, we shall take our broken pieces and build because **THE FOUNDATION HAS NOT CHANGED!** Halleluiah! And what good is a wall if the foundation be not established?

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:11 (KJV)

And so, they built the wall! They began by clearing away the rubble and then reorganizing it as they rebuilt the wall layer by layer. First, they laid the outline of what would be the length and width of the wall, then they filled in between, organizing more of the rubble. The exterior (*what people would see*) was supported and strengthened by the interior (*what people would not see*). That says in every ministry there will be people who are visibly seen as workers, but behind them will be people who also support the ministry but are not seen. All are necessary for the success of any ministry.

Permit me to give an example. When the choir sings a song with a lead singer, a lot of people focus on the lead singer complimenting that person on how well **THEY** sing. But oft times there is a choir behind them singing in the background who never receive the compliments. The song would not be what it is if not for all the voices supporting the soloist. So it is with ministry, you may not get to hear nor receive the compliments, but God knows everything everyone is doing. Your accolades may come later when you appear before the judgment seat and are rewarded for your faithfulness.

To rebuild our youth ministry let us first examine how the wall was built. In building the exterior portions (*what would be the outer sides of the wall*) and then

strengthening the whole wall by back-filling with both large and smaller pieces of rubble, the wall would rise level by level defined by the size of the rubble. And even though it was rubble, the rubble was organized to fit tightly together. And the Bible says all the people worked as one. If you examine the picture to the right, you will see the woman walking on top of what is believed to be a historical portion of Nehemiah's wall. You can see how broad the base is and how it was built up layer by layer. The base had to be able to support the weight of the wall, while its width added strength and stability.



Therefore, we must build the same way. First laying down the structure of our respective ministries and rules binding it together (*like an outline*), then back-filling with willing members until we too are strong and ready to handle the work. The more members we have participating translates into the work load the ministry will be able to handle. Right now, we have ministries with only a set few people doing all the work. As the workers wear themselves down, they are not able to take a break. What happens next is the workers become short tempered, easily angered, stressed out, and before you know it, they don't want to do the work anymore. Listen, even Jesus told the disciples to come apart with Him and get some rest! The more depth a ministry has, the better it will be at handling heavy workloads. Depth is often defined as the number of participants.

But wait! We must also have our focus on the community! And how will we incorporate that aspect into our ministries? I believe doing so will be easier than

most people think. Nehemiah included everyone in the effort to rebuild the wall. Some worked directly on the wall while others supported those who worked and their families. It was paramount that the work continue because their enemies were lurking about.

We can include the community by informing them of what we are doing (*youth sponsored programs such as fun trips, events such as worship in the park or having our Christmas Cantata, or just friendly reminders to join us for worship as examples*). As each ministry hosts an event or supports an event, word is sent to another ministry during the planning stage to get the word out. Advertisement is created, approved, and then sent out through various means informing the community.

Communicating with the community will be a separate ministry's specific purpose. And that separate ministry will create the flyers and get the word out through social media, community emails, our church website, etc. With ministries working together (*just as all the people worked together building the wall*), we can complete our rebuilding efforts in record time, and greatly increase the possibility of gaining new members who will come in and work with us to continue to build. We will see our church coming together, growing, and becoming stronger in the Lord!

No member of the church should be left out or turned away. Some have the desire but don't possess the know-how. That person may need to be trained in what to do. But everyone will have to work together as one church. If we will be bold in our work for the Lord, He will guide, deliver, and protect us. Especially when the enemy tries to discourage the workers through fear, negative comments, threats, etc. just like the enemy tried to do to Nehemiah.

QUESTIONS:

1. What happens when one person is the sole owner of the ministry? Why does this style of ministry discourage most participants?
2. How would one create the framework of a ministry?
3. How hard is it to work with rubble? Did working with rubble hinder Nehemiah and the Jews efforts to rebuild the wall?
4. Are you willing to help rebuild our youth ministry and make it better for the other youth coming after you?

LESSON 3

Opposition

Have you ever noticed that in ministry, whenever you start to do a good work, the enemy always seems to show up to try and hinder the work? When Nehemiah first arrived at Jerusalem, the enemy was already taking notice. Sanballat and Tobiah were quick to resent his arrival even though they did not yet know what he was doing there. But since he arrived with an escort and ample supplies, they paid very close attention and began to inquire.

As soon as they understood why Nehemiah had come, they began to spread threats and negative comments...

But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?

Nehemiah 2:19 (KJV)

Opposition can come in various forms and ways, but opposition must always have a voice! Someone who is willing to echo the words of the only one who still desires to put an end to anything God wants to do. Satan was once an anointed cherub until iniquity was found in him. The iniquity that caused his downfall was the sin of pride.

¹⁴ Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the

midst of the stones of fire. ¹⁵ *Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.* **Ezekiel 28:14-15 (KJV)**

Yes, Satan's fall was great as he was stripped of his glory. While we are here let's get one thing straight. Satan does not run around in a red outfit with horns on his head and a pointed tail and carrying a pitchfork. In the Bible he was covered with every precious stone, and the workmanship of his tabrets and his pipes was equally beautiful. But when he tried to make his own throne and set it above God's throne, God cast him out of Heaven. He fell to earth and Jesus even testified as a witness to this event. Look at what Jesus said...

*And he said unto them, **I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.***

Luke 10:18 (KJV)

The "lightning" was his glory being stripped away as he fell. So, what does the devil do now? Let's allow him to speak for himself to answer that question. One day the sons of God were gathered before Him, and Satan appeared with them...

And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. **Job 1:7 (KJV)**

Peter also described the devil who is our adversary this way...

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

There you have it! This is the true source of all our temptations, trials, and oppositions. He just needs someone to work through and in the case of Nehemiah, he found Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, the army of Samaria, and even a few Jews who were keeping the enemy informed. We will talk about that later.

Sanballat was the chief spokesman for the opposition. He did not want to see Jerusalem's wall rebuilt, nor the Jews come together. He immediately began a discouragement campaign against Nehemiah and the Jews. His plan was simple. They laughed at what the Jews were doing, they despised them, and they began to question what they were doing. Let's examine the purpose of each step.

1. Laughter –

This type of laughter is designed to cause scorn in the ears of the hearer. It is a laughter that says what you are doing is senseless and unenlightened. Whenever you put your mind to do something, it does not feel good when someone laughs at what you're doing as if you are ignorant for doing it.

2. Despised –

This word's root meaning is to be careless towards, to treat as despicable or with contempt. Sanballat and his cohorts had no regard toward the Jews for the work they were doing. They had just as well torn it all down again.

3. Questioning –

When someone doubts you or your ability, they will question everything you do. Their intent is to convince Nehemiah and the workers to stop what they are doing through exhaustive questioning designed to make them think otherwise about their work.

Everybody faces external opposition. Let me ask you this question, have your plans for good and faithful service to the Lord ever been frustrated? If you say they have by some way, that's normal and a compliment to the goodness of your plans. But if you say they haven't then I'm worried because they might not be good enough and the devil sees no need to bother. The only plans the devil tries to disrupt are the ones that draw us nearer to God or will win souls to Christ. Have you ever planned to start attending Bible Study and then suddenly you must work late, or things seem to go crazy on a Wednesday evening? The devil's number one plan is to keep you from getting close to God.

The enemies of Israel started out with verbal threats, but soon moved to slander, intimidation and threatening with weapons. We should already know how to combat intimidation (*remember John Bevere's book titled "Breaking Intimidation"?* *If you did not read that book, get it, and read it! And let me know if you get to the end of chapter 1 before getting on your knees and confessing your sins to God. Yes, it's that good!*)

Nehemiah responded to their attempts at intimidating him by turning the battle over to the Lord. Look at what he said...

*Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem. **Nehemiah 2:20 (KJV)***

In this answer, Nehemiah shows them that their strength, their determination, and their motivation comes from the God of Israel. Sanballat and his cohorts already have familiarity with the God of Israel thru history. He further says that they will obey Him and that their threats mean nothing because they are not a

part of God's nor Nehemiah's plan. Therefore, Nehemiah can ignore them because if they bother him or any of God's people, he knows the Lord will defend them.

Sanballat and Tobiah keep up their plan of ridiculing the Jews. Only now they speak to those who side with them (*Geshem & the army of Samaria*) with questions designed to force certain answers of agreement with their side. Look at Sanballat's questions...

*...What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? **Nehemiah 4:2 (KJV)***

Then Tobiah chimes in with insult...

*...Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. **Nehemiah 4:3 (KJV)***

We know Nehemiah heard what they said because he immediately prays to God for their insults to be turned back on their own heads, and for God to deal with them as he and the Jews continued to work on the wall.

But Nehemiah would also find out that there was opposition to what God was doing among the Jews. Internal opposition can be very painful! We all know that God had forbidden the Jews to marry foreign wives, or to allow their daughters to marry foreign men. At the time of Nehemiah rebuilding the wall, there were some Jews who had taken foreign wives of their enemies.

Tobiah was married to the daughter of Shecaniah, who was one of Nehemiah's key workers. And his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam who was one of Nehemiah's supervisors in the building project. Tobiah was also closely related the High Priest Eliashib. These family ties might allow Tobiah inside knowledge of everything Nehemiah is planning as well as how the building project is going. And we already know where Tobiah's loyalties lie.

As a pastor with over 25 years of experience, I can say it hurts deeply when a member of your team betrays the team. As you seek to rebuild your respective ministry, let us all be aware of anyone who runs out and tells everything that is being planned with a negative connotation, but they never disagree in the meetings. They are what one might call a rift maker. *Here is something to help.*

3 Signs of a developing Rift inside your team:

- 1. People on your team want to control rather than serve.**

For example: Deacon in Greek means "servant". Their primary role is to serve the Elders and the physical needs of the congregation. However, when a Deacon decides they would rather control people's lives and the direction of the church, we call those "Demon Deacons." We all have met the person on the team who wants to control rather than serve.

- 2. When the failure of other team members is not their concern.**

They are not concerned because they are too consumed with themselves and not the team goal. They often want a certain position that sometimes centers around control.

- 3. When team members try to manipulate others or circumstances to further their own agenda.**

Often, they work behind the scenes to build small coalitions who agree with them. They will not communicate openly in meetings. They do what we call end runs.

Like Nehemiah, we must all remain prayed up. We don't know when or where the challenges will come. But dealing with them is paramount to the success of all our efforts. We should follow Nehemiah's example of faith and reliance upon God and remain determined to do things God's way and not our own. Many churches today are what we would term family churches. So many within are family members or else related to the family. And what "the family" says goes, even over the Word of God unfortunately sometimes.

But God is able to deal with opposition if we just pray and turn it all over to Him. I'm a living witness that He will because it was my family that opposed me on more than one occasion. But standing on God's Word worked because it will accomplish the purpose for which it has been sent.

QUESTIONS:

1. When you are dealing with issues of control, what kind of spirit are you really dealing with?
2. How should one handle opposition so that there are no members lost?
3. In turning opposition over to God, are we done with it and don't need to do anything else?
4. Can opposition ever be good for us?
5. Should we fear families and family ties within God's house?

LESSON 4

Facing Intimidation

People who pursue power will often use that power to pressure others into doing what they want. Using power to create pressure is an effective way to get **AT** people. When others are not sure of themselves or what they are doing, they are way more likely to succumb to people with power because of fear. But if the objects of intimidation are confident in their task (*not fearing*), intimidation may well fail. Nehemiah had spent so much time in prayer with God until he was very confident in what God wanted him to do. God had already affirmed Nehemiah's plans by granting him favor with king Artaxerxes. Could intimidation work on him? Let's see!

When Sanballat heard that Nehemiah and the Jews continued to build the wall, he became very angry! The Bible says...

...he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.

Nehemiah 4:1b (KJV)

Nehemiah and the Jews worked hard, and their coordinated effort produced fast results. The wall reached half its height in just a few weeks. But their enemies were also growing in number. In addition to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the army of Samaria, they now had the attention of the Ammonites and the Ashdodites. All these enemies began to conspire together to attack Jerusalem, stop the work, and destroy all the progress the Jews had made!

Why is it that when people see ministries growing, someone tries to step in and take **CONTROL** of everything being done? Do they just want to be seen? Are

they only after public recognition? A controlling spirit is a witchcraft spirit. Don't think of a woman riding a broom with a black hat and black dress! Because if you have that image, you will miss seeing through whom the witchcraft spirit is working. Always remember, our task is to free any soul being controlled by an evil spirit, without driving that member away. This can be a difficult task, but we can always look to Jesus for our example and how He dealt with people who were demon possessed.

Intimidation's goal is to stop you in what you're doing and take control. Especially when what you are doing **IS** in line with the Word of God! And to do that, intimidation must cause you to fear. Let's look at one example of intimidation and what it tried to do to Nehemiah. In Nehemiah chapter 5, there came a great cry of the Jews against some of their brethren! What in the world could be going on?

*² For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live. ³ Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. ⁴ There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards. ⁵ Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards. **Nehemiah 5:2-5 (KJV)***

There were Jews who sought to profit monetarily from the Jews situation.

Rebuilding the wall was the number one concern for them and their city. Yet there were some who saw the task as an opportunity to get rich (*and to gain power or control*), and they began to take advantage of their brother's and sister's situation. Those who worked had to eat, and some of their brethren bartered with them for food, loans, mortgages, lands, homes, and even their children to become their brethren's personal slaves.

When Nehemiah heard this, he became very angry! But notice he did not immediately lash out in his anger. He pondered who would do such a thing, and then he accused the nobles and the officials and confronted them saying...

... "As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

Nehemiah 5:8 (NIV)

They were speechless! Conviction can leave one speechless! Nehemiah went on...

⁹ So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?" ¹⁰ I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! ¹¹ Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them--the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil." ¹² "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say." Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised.

Nehemiah 5:9-12 (NIV)

Nehemiah deals with the situation quickly and fearlessly. This is one of the more subtle forms of intimidation. Remember, it is a witchcraft spirit, and it desires to control. Why do I say that?

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. 1 Samuel 15:23a (KJV)

Some of the people feared not being able to feed their family. And because they were afraid, they fell prey to the intimidations of the nobles and officials. By having people indebted unto them, the nobles and officials could exercise control over them. And what would happen when their desires differed from Nehemiah's? They would end up trying to wrestle control over the people away from Nehemiah by forcing the people who feared them to do their bidding!

This has happened so many times in the church! Those who desire control will call their family and other members who are already in bondage to them (*saying, "You owe me a favor!" or "Remember when I helped you!"*) and rally the troops for a church meeting. Then through lies and sheer numbers, they try to wrestle control away from God's chosen servant and force him to be subject unto them. Just as what the nobles and officials were doing was destroying the people and the work, so when this happens in a church meeting the perpetrators are destroying God's people and His church! (*Remember the church is flesh and blood, not brick and mortar.*) Shame on those who do such a thing!

Right now, the pastor has asked all auxiliaries of the church to rebuild with a focus on serving the community. But all auxiliaries must be mindful of the devil

trying to work himself into the rebuilding process. He will say, “There is no way we can impact the community!”, or “Forget the community, we need church funds!”, or “We need a bigger voice so we can be heard and influence decisions!” In case you didn’t catch it, all three statements are attempting to lead everyone away from the main objective in order to create their own.

To defeat intimidation, we must walk in the authority given to us by God, and never be afraid of those who try to intimidate. For example, there are decisions that God desires for the Pastor of a church to make. When the scriptures provide the answer, it’s easier because we **MUST** follow scripture. But when scripture does not directly address the issue and everyone has an opinion, things can become a lot more difficult. But never forget, EVERYONE is under God’s authority! And God has the final say. And one more thing! We should never use scripture against scripture to get our way! I do not believe that pleases God in any way!

God gave Nehemiah the answer he needed, and he caused every noble and official to take an oath to stop what they were doing and never do it again.

QUESTIONS:

1. How do you react when people try to intimidate you regarding work you feel confident in doing?
2. How does your reaction differ if you are less confident about what you are doing?
3. Intimidation works best with fear. Have you ever been afraid to speak God’s Word in a setting where you’re the only Christian?
4. What is the best way to overcome intimidation?

LESSON 5

Revival

It's a shame but today the devil has even attacked the very thought of having a revival. I have heard this attack yelled (*yes yelled!*) at myself and other preachers! This is what the devil's servants say...

“Revivals don't work! Ain't nobody getting saved in no revivals! You never see anyone getting saved in a revival! So why have them? “

First of all, revival was never intended for the unsaved. Then who is revival for?

1. Revival is for them that are already saved.
2. Revival is for the ones who are at the church for almost everything, giving their time, talent, and strength for the Lord and His church, and they are spiritually exhausted and physically tired!
3. Revival is for teenagers who have lost interest in church and serving God due to the pressures of their friends and this world.

Second of all, most don't invite nor bring anyone who needs to be saved to revival. So, if nobody is getting saved, why fuss at the preacher? There is a great revival coming soon, and many will wish they had been there! But we need to truly understand what revival is. To gain insight, let us look to Nehemiah and the great revival he and the people of Jerusalem had.

Something remarkable happens that many of us have probably never seen in our lifetime. The people came together as one and spoke to Ezra the scribe and

called for him to bring out the book of the Law of Moses which God had commanded to Israel. Yes, you heard it right, the **PEOPLE** were as **ONE** and desired to know the book of the Law of Moses. And Ezra read to them from the book from morning until midday and no one complained about how long the "service" was! All the people were attentive to the book of the Law. And many need to see this for themselves lest they think I am making it up...

⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose;... ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Nehemiah 8:4-6 (KJV)

And when the people heard the words of the Law, they all wept. Why would hearing the Word cause them to weep? Because God's conviction for sin can be overwhelming, but always remember He chastises whom He loves. This is what revival is really about! People hearing the Word and self-checking themselves against the Word of God to see how they are walking, weeping in repentance when they are convicted, and realizing they are unprofitable servants when they have only done that which was their duty to do.

*So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. **Luke 17:10 (KJV)***

We will never impress God with our works, but with our faith we can please Him. The people reassembled the very next day to hear more and to learn more, that they might do more to obey the Lord. As the people learned what God wanted them to do, they responded by doing what the Law said. In return their hearts were made merrier day by day. This is what revival ought to do! So, the question now becomes, “Why are we not made merrier by revival?” I believe the answer may shock some!

Today we don’t come to learn the Word of God and judge ourselves that **WE** be not judged. Today we come and we judge the Word and the method of delivery. Was it entertaining? Did the preacher preach it in a way that ensnared me? Did he whoop? Can he whoop? Did anyone get up and start shouting? Was “I” able to feel the Spirit in the church?

How can we be made merrier when we sit in judgement of the preacher and/or the Word? The answer is we cannot. In order for us to get what we need; we have to do what the scriptures try to teach us to do.

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein. Luke 18:17 (KJV)

Jesus was not saying only the children are saved, he was saying we must become as children to receive the kingdom of God. A little child will believe whatever you tell him/her implicitly. But an adult will have doubts, skepticism, or will want it proven before they will believe. Our faith must become as accepting as the faith of a little child. If the Bible says it, then without question it is to be taken to heart by faith as true and we receive it and we believe it.

But once we are out on the battlefield called life, we will confess God's word and then wonder why it seems to have no effect on our enemies. When Jesus showed up, devils screamed, howled, and made confessions as to who He really is! But when we show up, the same doesn't seem to happen for us. Why is that? Let me see if I can help everyone to understand.

1. Do we pray as often as Jesus prayed?
2. Do we always do those things that please the Father like Jesus did?
3. Do we know the right scripture for the right situation?
4. Are we trying to wield the power of God on a brother or sister in Christ?
5. Does our heart want to **SEE** something bad happen to the one we are confronting or being confronted by?

Where in scripture do we see Jesus act like us? The answer is He doesn't. We must become like Him! Jesus countered every attack against Himself with the Love of the Father. Hate cannot defeat His love. Hate should not defeat our love either when our love is the same as His love. Revival can remind us of these things, there by reviving the correct spirit within each of us.

Revival reminds us to be forgiving toward each other, and even toward our enemies. Like Jesus, we should commit judgment to the only one who is fit to judge, while we put into practice our ability to forgive. We all must have the ability to forgive because we are yet sinners. And yet revival did more for the people in Nehemiah's day!

It's interesting to note that at that time, Ezra only read the scriptures. It was the Levites who taught the people what the scriptures were really saying. And this went on day after day.

*Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner. **Nehemiah 8:18 (KJV)***

I hate to say it this way, but the truth must be presented. Revivals **USED TO** be 5 nights of the week. Today many churches have 3-night revivals, and now some are cutting it back to 2 nights. Why the changes? Some preachers will no longer preach a 5-night revival, they will only do a 3-night revival, but they would like their payment to remain the same as for 5 nights. And now I am beginning to see churches advertising 2-night revivals. What might God have done if Ezra had said, "I will not read the book of the Law to you day after day, only 3 days and that's it!"? I shudder to think of what God might have done! Other reasons are finances, attendance, some congregations don't want 5-night revivals anymore, and the list could go on! The people in Nehemiah's day understood their true need for the Word of God. Do we?

The Levites began to confess the solemn goodness of God by reminding the people of their rich history which is filled with their own sins and with the love and forgiveness of God. There is a very good reason for the Levites to remind them in this way. It shows them that they are just like their forefathers in being a stiff-necked people and turning away from God, but it also shows them God's love and His forgiveness if they return to Him. Doing it this way is an encouragement to the all the people to return to our Father in Heaven.

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your own opinion of having a revival?