

How Can You Find God's Will With Prayer and Planning?

- [Announcer] Nehemiah chapter two. "In the month of Nisan, "in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes "when wine was before him, "I took up 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 father's graves lies in ruins, "and its 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 if your servant has found favor in your sight, "that you send me to Judah, "to the city of my father's graves, that I may rebuild it. "And the king said to me, 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 him a time. "And I said to the king, if it pleases the king, "let letters be given 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 Asaph "the keeper of the king's forest that he may give me timber "to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple "and for the wall of the city "and for the house that I should occupy. "And the king granted me what I asked, "for the good hand of my God was upon me. "Then I came to the governors of the province "beyond the river and gave them the king's letters. "Now, the king has sent with me officers of the army "and horseman, but when Sanballat the Horonite "and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, "it displeased them greatly that someone had come "to seek the welfare of the people of Israel. "So I went to Jerusalem and was there for 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 into 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 into the Dund 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 in the night by the valley "and inspected the wall, "and I turned back and entered by the valley gate "and so returned. "And 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 build the wall 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 that the king had spoken to me. "And they said, let us rise up and build. "So they strengthened their hands for the good work. "But when Sanballat the Horonite "and Tobiah the Ammonite servant "and Geshem the Arab heard of it. "They jeered at us and despised us and said, "what is this thing you are doing? "Are you rebelling against the king? "Then I replied to them, "the God of heaven will make us prosper. "And we his servants will arise and build, "but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."

- All right, we're in Nehemiah chapter two. You ready to go? Woo. All right, I'm gonna go either way, so I'm ready to go. How many of you are in a season right now? You've got a pivot in life. Things have changed. You've got a big decision to make. You're looking at the future trying to figure out how to prepare for it. Maybe you're having kids. Maybe you're getting married. Maybe

your kids are leaving home. Maybe some of you just moved here from another city or state. We always say, welcome, welcome, welcome. But please vote with us. In addition, Grace and I are in this really great season, honestly, one of the most enjoyable seasons of my whole life. With our family Grace and I are looking into our future and we're making plans. So I'm in my notebook, got all kinds of great ideas with real faith and our online ministry making plans for the future. Here at the church, we're in the middle of the Rebuilding Home campaign. Lots of great things to look forward to. Super excited, and I'm happy to report Grace and I were getting along, but it didn't always start like this. How many of you are married? Okay, how many of you are different? Amen. How many of you are frustrated? Okay, there we go. All right. We now have touched all the married couples. When Grace and I were first married and we had to make a decision about our family or ministry or the future, we realized that we came to our decision making totally different. She would pray and I would plan. So she'd be like, I'm just gonna talk to the Lord. He'll take care of it. I was like, Yeah, he'll take care of it through me. So I gotta make a plan. So she would just pray and trust the Lord and then I would make a lot of plans. And then I felt like sometimes she wasn't practical enough and sometimes she felt like I wasn't spiritual enough. And I'd say, "Well, what's your plan?" She be like, "My plan is to pray". Like, well, that's not a plan. Plan is where you write things down. She'd be like, "Did you pray about your plan?" Like I made a good plan and I told the Lord he could do it. I asked, So, you know, Lord, please bless my plan. And so sometimes when we made decisions early in our relationship, she was more of the prayer, I was more of the planner. And what we've learned is we both need to be strong and good at both. So I'm happy to report I do pray. As your pastor, I'm happy to report I do pray. And also Grace has learned how to make plans, budget, schedules, look into the future sequence and plan things. How many of you are more like me and Jesus and you're a planner? How many of you, okay, how many of you more like Grace and Jesus and you're a prayer? And here's the big idea, we're better together. The question today is, how can you find God's will with prayer and planning? And what Grace and I have learned is that prayer and planning are like the two feet that God gives you to walk with God. Need to pray, God what do you want me to do? Where do you want me to go? Plan, God, how am I gonna do that, Obey that, fulfill that? They go together. And Nehemiah, really the whole book of Nehemiah is a case study on how do you pray and plan? How do you find God's will and then walk in it? That's the case study. And so the story is Nehemiah is a Jewish guy, but he's far away from home. He's with God's people, but they've been taken basically hostage, they're slaves in the Persian Empire. He's in the capital city of Susa, far away is his home country of Israel, his home city of Jerusalem the walls are broken, the gates are burned. This would be like somebody burned the front door to your house. You can't secure your property. I know we don't understand this, but imagine a country that didn't have a secure border with a wall, how horrible that might be. So that was exactly what was happening in the nation of Israel. And as a result, he was heartbroken because the country that he loved was in decline. The city that he loved was devastated, and the church was closed 'cause God's people couldn't raise their families there and worship God freely. So what does he do? He prays and plans. We looked in chapter one, he spends three to four months praying. He's fasting, he's journaling, he's prays like, God, I don't like what is happening and things need to change, but I'm not sure what to do about it or what my part is in it. So he's praying, praying, praying. And then here we start seeing the result of his planning in chapter two. And so within

this, when we pray and plan, what we're asking God is, what is my part in your purpose? When you pray, it's like, God, what do you have to say to me? Plan, God what do you want me to do so that I get to be part of your big purpose, and that is advancing your cause and your kingdom. And so this is gonna be a leadership lesson. Nehemiah is one of the great leadership books in the Bible. And I think it's really timely as we look into our future, even as a nation or as a state, may I ask what's gonna happen politically? What's gonna happen economically? What's gonna happen culturally? It looks highly concerning. Amen. How many of you look into the future like it looks great? If so, we need your medication, right? You're doing great. For the rest of us that are living here in reality, the future looks a little bit concerning and scary. And the question is, well, how do we hear from God? Pray. How do we plan for ourselves, for our families, for our church, for our businesses, for our future? We can't control everything but we can worship the God who can control our destiny. So it's a case study in leadership. So I'm gonna move through these quickly. First principle is this. God uses misery for ministry. Chapter one, verse two. He is in a position of misery. He's in Persia. He wants to be back in his home country of Israel. He's in Susa, he wants to be in Jerusalem. He's working for a demonic ungodly king. He wants to be serving the king of kings. He is heartbroken, he is weeping, he is frustrated. How many of you right now looking at our culture, looking at our state, looking at our nation, you're a little heartbroken and frustrated? You're like, you know what? This isn't working and something needs to change. So he is in a place and things are in a place that are for him a misery. It's just a miserable season for him. But then ultimately we see here that God is gonna use that for his ministry. And this is what God is gonna do. God is gonna take him from Susa to Jerusalem, from Persia to Israel. God is gonna take him from misery to ministry. And sometimes when you're frustrated, sometimes when you're heartbroken, sometimes when you're sick of it, that's the beginning of your calling. You know that something is wrong, so you gotta talk to the Lord, okay Lord, how can I be a part of making this right? So don't just be discouraged when you're experiencing misery. Bring it to the Lord and find your opportunity to turn it into ministry. So then in chapter two versus one and two, we're gonna see that some things are worth living for and some things are worth dying for. And one of the most important questions you've gotta ask is, what am I willing to live for? What am I willing to die for? It should usually be the same thing. In chapter two versus one and two. He says, I had not been sad in the king's presence before. So he works for the king. We saw at the end of chapter one, he's cupbearer to the king. Cupbearer to the king was a rough job. There were constant attempts to kill the king, so before he drank and any wine you would drink it and if you died, then he didn't drink it. So if the way you know you did a good job is you died. That's how you know you did a good job. The good news is you died well drinking wine. So if you gotta go, that's not a bad way to go. But nonetheless, he's working for this demonic horrible king, for this nation that overtook and enslaved its people. He is a slave. He's probably castrated and he's working for the government. And at the end of the day, this is not where he wants to be or what he wants to be doing. And he comes before the king and he says, For the first time in the king's presence, I was sad. I couldn't contain my emotion. Some of you are really good at sort of, how are you doing? I'm doing great. And some of you, you reach a point with certain things, you're like, I'm not doing great. I can't fake it till I make it. I'm just not there. So the king ask him, "Why is your face sad?" "You're not sick, what's going on?" "This is nothing but sadness of heart". And then what he says is, I was very much

afraid. I was very much afraid because here's their culture, when you come before the king, you need to be happy, especially if the king is with the queen. Because if you come before the king and you seem like you don't want to be there, you're disinterested, you're unhappy, you're not joyful, that's a disrespect to the king and you're disrespecting the king in front of the queen. And this guy rules and reigns like a God. And he's a bit of a thug. To get the throne he killed his brother. He's put down two insurrections against him. He's gonna rule for a total of 40 years with an iron fist. He is a bit of a mob boss. And the rule is you should be happy to be in his presence, and if you're not, he's not happy to keep you. He'll kill you. How many of you are in a season or have had something that is so overwhelming, so burdensome, so frustrating, so concerning that you can't just pretend like you're okay? Somebody looks at you like, are you okay? No, I'm not. I can't hide it. It's showing on my face because it's wearing on my soul. That's where he is at. And here was why he was afraid. You were only supposed to be a burden lifter, not a burden giver for the king. Some of you know what this is like. You've got a rough boss, you've got somebody very difficult, that's a customer or a client at work and you're not allowed to bring them any problem. You're to solve the problem. There are two kinds of people. There are people who are burden givers and there are people who are burden lifters. How do you know the difference? Well, if a burden lifter is coming, here's what you do. You go somewhere else, if the burden giver comes. If you have a burden and the burden lifter comes toward you, you approach them. He's only supposed to be with the king, a burden lifter, never a burden giver. This is a one way relationship. You lift the burdens of the king. You don't bring any burdens to the king. He's so burdened, he can't help it. This could be seen as disrespectful. This could cost him his life, but he's willing to die to serve his God. And he's hoping to live so he can serve his God. There are certain things that are not a big deal. There are a few things that are worth living and dying for. And for him, seeing the church be open, God's people be blessed and God be worshiped, he's willing to live for that. He's willing to die for that. In addition, we then see he stops to pray for the message and the messenger. In chapter two, verse four, the king said to me, What are you requesting? So I prayed to the God of heaven. Now, previously in chapter one, he prayed for three or four months and he's praying, God, let me leave my job. Let me have the king's blessing. Let me go from Persia to Israel, from Susa to Jerusalem. Let me go from serving this demonic king to king Jesus. Give me an opportunity to try and pivot my life. I've got prayers for a change. I've got plans for a change. But now I need the king to give me permission for the change. His moment comes, and what does he do? He prays again. You're gonna see him pray throughout the whole book. If memory serves me correct, there's nine different prayers in the book. This guy prays a lot and he plans a lot. If you've already prayed for something for three months and then the king asks, "What do you want?" Now you have your opportunity. Why would you stop and pray again? Because you not only prepared the message, but the messenger. He knows what he wants to ask. But he needs to stop and pray to make sure that he says the right thing, with the right tone, with the right words, the right way. And to make sure this is the right time and to pray that the king's ears would interpret it the right way. I'll share this with you and I wanna apologize to you. This is the Saturday Night Service. How many of you weren't here last week? Okay, well you missed a pretty crummy sermon. I didn't do a great job. I wanted to. I got home and I was so frustrated with your senior pastor, and I rewrote the sermon 'cause I didn't do a great job. And I went for a long walk and I had a talk to the Lord

and I was like, Lord, I started Nehemiah, I wanted to do a good job. I mean and I wrote a study guide. I got daily We got a graphic, you know, people read things like we were trying and somehow I just did not execute well. I didn't do well. It wasn't like the worst sermon in the world, but it was an attempt. And I was going for, I was like, Lord, what happened? And the Lord spoke to me and he said, you prepared the message but not the messenger. I knew what I wanted to say but I didn't say it the way that I wanted to say it. What I find is it takes me longer to prepare the messenger than it does to prepare the message. It takes me a couple hours to prepare a sermon. It takes me a couple hours to prepare the preacher. And last week I got busy and that would be my excuse. How many of you not praying? You have an excuse, you're like, Lord, I had so much to do, I didn't have time for you. He's like, well, if you would've started with me maybe I would've taken a few things off your list for you. Helped you out son. And so what I did is I didn't get my weekly prayer time with the Lord. I like to go up to the mountains. I like to hike, I like to pray. I like to verbal process. 'Cause if I do that in my neighborhood, they think I'm crazy and they call the cops. There's a man walking around shouting at the sky. If you're in the woods, the deer don't have internet, you're fine, so that's the way I roll. And the time preparing the messenger to me is more important than the time preparing the message. 'Cause even if I don't have a message ready, if the messenger is ready, the Holy Spirit could give me the message. And so I wanna apologize to you. Your messenger wasn't ready last week and some of you're like, he's not this week either. Well thank you for your encouragement. Just pray for me. But he stops to prepare not just the message but the messenger. Like is this the right thing to say, right time to say it, right way to say it? Is my tone gonna be okay? This is important and this is where when we have a difficult or important conversation, make sure you're fasting, journaling, praying, write out what you wanna say, hear from the Lord, get the message right. But then it's okay to stop and pray a quick prayer just to make sure that the messenger's right. And he probably does this silently, which to me is quite amazing, because Satan and demons can hear our words and they can see our deeds, and sometimes I think they can even read our body language, but they can't hear our thoughts. And so when we pray to God silently, only God knows our thoughts, as a result it's like this private communication channel. And I think he's like, Okay Lord, I know what I wanna say. I pray that I do it right. But please open his ears as well. 'Cause it's not just the communicating, it's the interpreting. Then we see that your resources are in your relationships. These are all leadership principles. It's a book on leadership. If you're a parent, you're a leader. If you're serving in ministry, you're a leader. If you have management responsibilities at work, you're a leader. If you're a coach, you're a leader. If you're a big brother or sister, you're a leader. And your resources are in your relationships. So he says this in chapter two versus three through five. First he says, Let the king live forever. Which is good, right? 'Cause that's his job to make sure the king lives forever. So he's like, I'm for you. I'm about ready to make a big request. So, hey, I wore my shirt. Go king, I'm for you. Let's make Persia grade again. All right. Just think of stuff. If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, this is important. Send me to Judah, the city of my father's graves that I may rebuild it. Here's what he's saying. If I have demonstrated character and earned your trust, I would like to make the first request in our entire relationship. The problem is this, if you ask all the time, you're gonna wear out your welcome when the time of need really comes. He's probably never asked the king for anything in his entire life, it's a one way relationship. The

king's like, do this, do this, do this, do this. And Nehemiah never shows up to work and says, "Hey, I got a list of requests too". This is the first time he's ever asked for anything. Be careful you don't ask too much otherwise you'll wear out your welcome. And when the day of need comes, you will not get the request answered because you've already burned the bridge. And here what he says is, I'm for you, but I'm gonna make a request of you. If I have found favor in your site. And what he's saying is this, king you know my character. So do you think you just get to start as cupbearer to the king? I mean, do you think this was like, I don't know, posted as a job review, like a, now hiring cupbearer to the king, if you're good at dying and drinking wine, you can apply and we'll interview you. This is not a job that you apply for. This is a job that you are invited into after you have proven years of character and faithful service. You're now in the king's home. You're in the king's presence, you're in the Queen's presence, You're overseeing the welcome of foreign dignitaries. Literally global leaders lives are in your hands. What he's saying is this, I've been a slave my whole life. I've served faithfully. If I have done a good job, if you trust my character, I'm gonna make a request. I wanna leave Susa, I wanna go to Jerusalem, I wanna leave Persia, I wanna go to Israel. I wanna stop working for you. And I wanna start working for the King of Kings. I've got another project that I have been praying for and I have plans for. What's crazy about this in the book of Ezra, which is a corollary. Ezra Nehemiah work on the same project at the same time. And there's another book of the Bible called Ezra. I've got the cross references in the study guide. You can get it for free at realfaith.com. But 13 years prior it's recorded in the book of Ezra. The same request was made of the same king for the exact same thing, and the answer was no. So this is a crazy request. You're also asking the king to overturn governmental foreign policy and his own decree. You're asking him to change his mind. But that's the request that he makes. You'll see in a moment that it gets answered 'cause here's the king, but he's praying to that king of kings who has authority over the king. And sometimes true false as believers, we can get frustrated with politicians. True or false? Yes, yes. He can get very frustrated with this politician. He's not making good decisions, he's not doing what's best for God's people. He's not allowing freedom and faith for our families. And it's frustrating. So he makes a request to his king, the king of kings. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is a stream of water "in the hand of the Lord. "He turns it wherever he wills". What it says is this, there are kings, but over them is the king of kings. And sometimes the king of kings can even work through that ungodly king. The next principle is that vision requires provision. I like to say it this way here. We believe in Jesus and math. You need to believe in Jesus and math. Right now we've got a governmental problem. We've got headed into recession. We've got all kinds of issues. 'Cause most Americans don't believe in math. Okay, true or false? True. Just say, here's a crazy idea. If you don't have it and you spend it eventually that's going to potentially be a problem. Just throwing it out there as a prayer request. All right, So in chapter two, verse six through eight, the king asked him, "What do you want?" Make your request. And he makes a series of requests. First, the king asked him, How long are you gonna be off for? As you read the book, he's asking for 12 years off paid leave. Okay, that's quite, you're laughing, but there are people in America right now, that's what they're trying to do. They're like, I'd vote for that guy. That's a great guy right there. 12 years paid off. So 12 years paid leave. How many of you if you walked into your boss and they're like, What do you need? I need some time off. How long? 12 years. They're like, well make it 50. You know, there's the

door 12 years paid leave. In addition, he's gotta make this journey from one city and country to another, and it could take him months to make the journey. And so what he's asking is, I need you to give me official government documents that give me safe passage and that you'll be defending and protecting my mission. So he is asking for governmental support. In addition, he's asking for employees and staff. He's asking for lumber. And where does he ask for the lumber from? From the king's private forest. He's like, yeah, I need wood. You have the best wood, can I have your wood? That's a big request for a slave to a king. He's asking, I'm asking you to personally fund the rebuilding of the city, the rebuilding of the temple so that we can go worship God. The one thing that your nation 141 years ago stopped by invading and destroying us. I'm asking you to undo everything that your government has been committed to for 141 years. In addition, he's asking for a personal residence. He says, When I get there, I'm gonna need a place to live King. So I need you to give me a nice, safe, secure house. Does this seem like a lot? This is a lot. And then he's asking, okay, when I get there, I would like to be the political leader and I'd kinda like to be the government, and the president and the governor, so I'll rule, okay? And this means that who benefits? Nehemiah, 100%. Who's taking all the risk? The king is like, okay, so you're gonna leave your job is to keep me from being murdered. And you'd like me to send the military to protect you and pay for it outta my forest, and give you a big house and let you be the leader for 12 years. And then we'll pick up where we left off. Let me say, you don't make this request unless you have heard from God or you're drunk. That's it. This is a big request. The only way you make a request this big is, he was praying and fasting for three or four months. He's like, okay, God, you want me to go into him and ask that? Yes. And the king grants his request because here's the big idea, vision requires provision. Vision requires provision. And some people think that ministry is only spiritual, it's also very practical, it's both. You're like we need to be in the spirit and pray and sing and love the Lord and seek the Lord, and trust the Lord and forgive each other. And yeah, all true. And somebody needs to go to the bathroom, right? Otherwise you're like, well just hold it for Jesus. They're like, well, you know, I need a bathroom. True or false? In Arizona we need air conditioning.

- [Congregation] Yes.

- We do. If you're new, you need it. Otherwise you won't just believe in Jesus you'll see him, like you'll be there, right? So there's just some practical stuff, like you gotta park a car, probably gonna need a restroom, gonna need water, gonna need air conditioning, just practical stuff. And what Nehemiah is doing here, some people would look at this, they'd be like, oh, he's all about the money. He's all about the numbers. He's all about, you know, just, you know, the facilities like, no, no, no. What he's trying to do is he's trying to get a house open so that God's family could worship there. The goal is not to have the best building. The goal is to have a place for God's family. Ministry is very spiritual it's also very, very practical. Then what he reminds us is that anointing is everything. In chapter two, verse eight, he said, "The king granted me what I asked". How many of you, that's a crazy line? And here's what he says, "For the good hand of my God was upon me". He says, we got the miracle because God does miracles. That's what he's saying. And when he's talking about the hand of God on his life, he's talking about the presence of the Holy Spirit. The language of the Bible is that the Holy Spirit is sent from the

Father to us, like a hand to come and protect us. How many of you are a dad? What does your hand do for your child? Does your hand protect your child? Oh, don't go over there. Don't go into the road. Come here, protect you. Does your hand provide for your child? Here you need this. Eat this, you know, I'd love you to take care of you. Does your hand direct your child? Hey, just take my hand. Just follow me. Does your hand bless your child? Let me bless you. When he says that the hand of God is upon him, that's the person, the presence, the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the anointing of God. And so the Father is in heaven and he sends the Holy Spirit to place his hand on Nehemiah to protect him, to lead him and guide him, to provide for him to bless him. So what happens is this, when wonderful, miraculous, supernatural things happen, Nehemiah gives credit to God. He doesn't say, man, I really nailed it. What a plan? What he says is the good... What kind of hand? The good hand of my God was on me. He's like, God showed up. And I would tell you guys, I have seen God's hand all over my life. I have seen Him protect. I have seen Him provide, I have seen Him direct and I have seen Him bless. And that's even the story of our church. For those of you who know the story of our church, how we got this building, the hand of God showed up. I didn't mean to share it, but I will briefly, since we're talking about buildings and such. We had no people, no money and the building wasn't available. So I asked, hey, can we buy it? Like, well, you have no people, you have no money and it's not available. And then they'd call back, they're like, okay, you can buy. It's like, okay, I still have no people and no money. They're like, okay. I was like can you give us a year to raise the down payment? And can you serve as the bank? And they're like, you know what? Yes. It's like, how do you get a building with no people and no money? God's hand. It's just like... I've heard people say like, how'd you do that? Like, I don't do that. I don't do miracles. I do Mark, all I can do is Mark. I can't do miracles. But God shows up and he does incredible things. And part of that should just encourage us. And then when we tell the story, we tell the story that he gets the glory. Because ultimately the anointing is everything. And so far true or false, so far it's going great. So you know, that's gonna shorten up soon. Here's when God acts Satan reacts. Chapter two verse 10. Sanballat and Tobiah. This is Pete and repeat. These are like two barrels on a gun. This is like Bonnie and Clyde. These guys are terrible. They're in the beginning of the book. They're through the whole book. They're there at the end of the book. They're always an enemy. They're always a problem. They're critics and enemies and opponents. To quote that great theologian, Taylor Swift. Haters gonna hate. That's just where we find ourselves. Sanballat and Tobiah heard this. They heard that God had done a miracle. It displeased them greatly. They were angry that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel. The Christian, the believers were scattered. The church was closed. Morale was low. And what these are, these are political leaders that rule and govern surrounding territories. There are some people that they don't want our city to succeed. There are some people they don't want our state to succeed. There are some people, they don't want our country to succeed. There are some people they don't want our church to succeed. And when they hear that things are going good, that's bad for them. These two men become the face of the organized opposition to the entire life and ministry of Nehemiah. This is the beginning of spiritual warfare in the book. Because at this point, God acts and Satan reacts. Everything God builds, Satan tries to break. Everything God creates, Satan tries to counterfeit. Every time you're trying to advance the cause of God, someone is trying to stop you from advancing the cause of God. And they form an unholy

alliance. They're different governors for different regions, but they form together as an unholy alliance. That's what happens in spiritual warfare. I've said it before, but sometimes people don't know each other, but their demons do and they introduce them. And they form an unholy alliance. They're like, I hate them, I hate them too. Now we're friends, we hate them together. It's an unholy alliance. A friend of mine he helps run men's ministry here with us here at the church. And he was a top gun pilot. And he said, you knew that you were over the target when you started to get enemy fire. If you're cruising and nothing is happening, you're like, I don't think we're near a secure target. As soon as you're like, oh my gosh, there is a lot of shelling coming our way, we must be over a strategic target. Ultimately, sometimes in life, if it's your family, your business or ministry, you're getting a lot of fire. It may be because you are advancing into enemy territory and you're over a strategic target. It's spiritual warfare. And I'll just say this, I told Grace, I don't wanna leak or vent at this point. I'll just say that in some churches and ministries, the pastor has a platform. He can be a little complicated with his personality. Not everybody appreciates a sense humor. Some people are opposed to his directness and so they attack him and the people that are with him. So you say, "How do you know this?" I know a guy. And so what that means is, in those ministries, the saints need to have some thicker skin. They just gonna have to. I'm not talking about you guys, but this other congregation that I know of. But at the end of the day Nehemiah is going to get attacked from beginning to end of the book, and the people are going to get attacked because they agree with him and they're following his leadership on their mission. So these saints are gonna need to have thicker skin. In addition, your confidence comes from your calling. Chapter two, verse 12. He says this, This is, "What God, what my God had put into my heart to do". So when God calls you to something, there's going to be a test of your calling. Let's say God calls you to get anybody been married. Have you ever had your marriage tested? Unless you're on your honeymoon. Yes. How many of you, you decide, okay, God wants us to start this business or company, then it's tested. God wants us to serve in this ministry, it's tested. God wants us to relocate or move our family, it's tested. God wants us to give generously, it's tested. When God calls you to something, there's gonna be a test and the test is part of your testimony. You can't have a testimony without a test. So God calls you and then it gets tested and you know where your confidence comes from to endure and to persevere? From his calling. Your confidence comes from his calling. Nehemiah was told by God, go work on the city, open the church, love and serve the people. Get them together so that I can send the Holy Spirit to help them and to heal them so that they can worship me. Now he gets opposition. He's like, I will not retreat, I will not surrender, I will not apologize. I am called, Okay? So you know my story. When I was 19, God said, spoke to me, said marry Grace. There are times that our marriage has been tested, but we are called to be together. So we work it through. God said, preach the Bible. I've been doing this 26 years. Every once in a while I'm like, could I be a mattress tester that sounds like a great job. You know, like that is my backup fantasy job. You're like, I'm gonna sleep on the mattress and I'll tell you in the morning how it went. But no, there are times that the calling gets tested, but if you're called, you gotta be courageous to persevere. Marry Grace, preach the Bible, train men. That's why I have a heart for men. That's why I met real men most every week, we broadcast it. We build men up to bless women and children 'cause that's what God told me to do, and to plant churches. And so God said, marry Grace, that's our family. God said, preach the Bible, that's real faith. God said, train

men, so that's real men and also what Grace and I do with our marriage ministry, and then plant churches and so we planted trendy church. Every single calling has some sort of opposition and testing. And your courage comes not from your strength. Your courage comes not from your toughness. Your courage comes not from your wisdom. Your courage comes from your calling. God said, go forward, I got no choice. He said, go forward, that's what I'm doing. And that's exactly what he says. Let me say this about God's. 'Cause he says, this is what my God put in my heart to do. What he's saying is, I can't do anything else. This is what I am called to do. I'll live or I'll die doing my calling. And what God's calling does, number one, it eliminates laziness. If God has called you to something you can't be lazy. And I'm gonna talk more in a future sermon about hearing from God. How does God speak? Not just prayer, but listening prayer. We're gonna make this all really practical. But let me introduce the concept today of praying is about listening. So that you find the will of God and his calling on your life. He then gives you a burden to join him and what he's doing. And as your testimony is tested, your courage comes from your calling and it eliminates laziness. You're like, you know what if God said to go do this, I can't just quit or give up or give in. People that I know that are really called to, let's say ministry, Bible teaching, even if they retire from their work, they don't retire from their ministry. I've told Grace, like I'm gonna preach the Bible until I'm not making sense. Somebody here is like, that was last year. Okay. I said, just bring me home and give me a sandwich and tell me we're done. Okay? And so, you know, I mean I like sandwiches so I'm fine either way. But you know, I just need to keep doing it as long as I can do it 'cause that's what he said to do. It eliminates laziness. It also overcomes fear. If you know you're called to something. 'Cause what he said previously when he was at the presence of the king, he said, I was afraid. We'll say, well if you're afraid, how did you push through the fear? Because the courage comes from his calling. You're gonna be afraid, but if you're called you go ahead anyways. In addition, when you're called by God to something, love this spouse, raise these kids, serve this God, work this job, help this ministry, whatever you're called to, it'll also keep you from wasting your life. I'll never forget a conversation I had some years ago with a man, he just retired. Early in his career he decided that he was gonna "climb the corporate ladder". That was his goal. And he did it. He built a massive company. He was his guy. No, I love him, he's a good guy. But at the end of his life, he was well known in his field. He sold his company, cashed in, had more money than he could spend in a lifetime. And his wife and he didn't have much of a relationship and so she divorced him. And his kids didn't really feel that he cared about them or invested in them, so he was estranged from them. He did know the Lord but he wasn't really a man who found God's will for his life. He wanted God to bless his plan. He didn't wanna work God's plan. So here he is and then he's heartbroken 'cause his wife left him and his kids don't really talk to him, and he is just sitting there with all this money and no one to do life with. And he didn't even really have a church to support him or encourage him 'cause he was usually too busy to really go to church and build relationships. And I talked to him and I'll never forget what he said, he said, I spent my whole life climbing the corporate ladder. And he said, I got to the top and then I realized it was on the wrong wall. If you don't know your calling, you could climb to the top of the wrong wall, the ladder on the wrong wall. How do you know when you wake up tomorrow, you're like, okay, am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing? Am I living how I'm supposed to be living? Until you hear from God, it's hard to make any other decision. Nehemiah knows what he's supposed to

do. Let me ask you this, does he know whether he will succeed or fail?

- [Congregation] No.

- No. Does he know whether he'll live or die? Nope. But he knows this, I'm gonna do what I'm supposed to do. And then he has to confront the brutal facts. Chapter two 12-16. He says, I went out by night. Sometimes if you really wanna know how a culture's doing and how a city is going, go out at night. During the day you're like, it's not so bad, at night you're like, it's a haunted house, hosting the purge. Like it's not good. He goes out by night and he says, I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and the gates that have been destroyed by fire. There was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. He's like, things were so beat up and broken I couldn't even get my horse through the ruins that I went up by the night to the valley and inspected the wall. The officials did not know I had gone or what I was doing. The point is this, he goes out to inspect and then he deals with the brutal facts. This wall is large, he's supposed to rebuild it. They'll tell us the archeologist, it was between a mile to two and a half miles around. In addition, it was three to four feet thick, 15 to 20 feet high. It had gates in it just like you got a front door on your house and those were burned, the walls were destroyed and the stones were scattered. So he uses these words, broken down, destroyed by fire. The point is this, as a leader, if you're a good leader and or you're leading a good team, you'll make a bad decision with wrong information. And a lot of times people are like, I'm a good leader, or we've got a good team as long as I think it's a good idea and or our team agrees, let's proceed forward. But the point is, what if he get bad information? A good leader and or a good leadership team makes a bad decision without the right information. So what he doesn't do is he doesn't ask, how's it going? He says, I'm gonna go see for myself. How many of you, let's say you're in management at a company. If you ask your employees, how's it going, What do they say?

- [Congregation] Good.

- Great. Then you show up you're like not, because people don't like to tell the truth sometimes because they're not doing their job. And we call this America. That's where we find nobody's doing their job, but everybody thinks they're doing a good job. So he goes out to inspect and gets the facts for himself. A good leader has to get the right information to come to a good decision. I'll give you two examples. How many of you remember if you're a little bit older, the war in Iraq. We invaded Iraq, we toppled Saddam Hussein, we managed the country. It was a 10 year deployment. Money spent, lives lost. The whole goal was to find weapons, mass destruction. And there weren't any. I was gonna say the wisdom of the American government, but that just didn't sound right in church 'cause you're not supposed to lie. But what happened was the American government and the military forces with all of their intelligence got bad information, and it led to the invasion of a country and the toppling of a dictator. Also, another case study, more recent, I dunno if you guys heard about this. There was this thing called COVID 19, a few years ago. I dunno if you guys heard about, if not, I'm sure it's on the internet. There's probably something about it. But true or false, that lots of decisions were made but not

all the information was accurate? If you're like, no, it was great, then you're in the wrong church. Okay? But what happens is they're like, oh, we're all gonna die. And you're like, no, we're not. So what do we do? I mean we shut down the schools now kids get mental health issues and you know, grades are cratered and the economy is, you know, not doing well. And there's all kinds of upheaval and they're all like, Oo, we had to. It's like not all the information was accurate. Don't just hear and come to a conclusion. Make sure you find reality and then make a plan. So he confronts the brutal facts, and then another leadership lesson, to lead others you must first follow the Lord. He says this in two 17 and 18. I said to them, he assembles the people, he looks them in the eye. You see the trouble we're in now he's like, we got trouble. Jerusalem lies in ruins. God's people are struggling. It's gates are burned. Come let us build. He's inviting them the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer suffer derision. I told him the hand of God was upon me. And also that the king did a miracle and he gave us the green light. Nehemiah is confident that he is following the Lord, so he's confident to invite others to follow him as he follows the Lord. Nobody will follow you unless you are following him. Follow me. Are you following him? He hears sort of echoes Jesus, come follow me. And what he's saying is, what we're doing is glorifying to God. This is what God wants and it's good for you. It's good for you. Jim Collins, a leadership guru, he'll talk about level five leadership. And level five leadership is where the leader cares about the people and they believe it because it's true. You know when someone is selling you or using you, you know when someone is loving you and helping you. Nehemiah is like, we have a problem. God sent me here to help lead the solution. We're gonna rebuild church. We're gonna worship God. We're gonna enjoy life together. We're gonna be God's people. I know you're discouraged. I know you're frustrated. I know you're depressed. But God's gonna do something and he's gonna use us to be a part of it. And the people decide, we agree, we're in. For 141 years lots of leaders showed up and said, let's fix it. And the people said, "We think it's about you, not about us. "We think you're using us not loving us. "We think you're selling us not serving us." But he's got genuine integrity. So it was going bad, then it was going good, now it's going good, so it's gonna go bad. Welcome to life on Earth. The negative narrative comes next. Negative narratives are normal. Chapter two verse 19. But when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab. So now they're recruiting for the war. The three political leaders bring in a, excuse me. The two political leaders recruiting a third political leader. These are the nations that surround God's people. So now literally they've got them surrounded with enemies and opponents. They jeered at us, made fun, and they despised us. Late night comics and stand up routines and lots of memes and said, what is the thing that you are doing are you rebelling against the king? Whoa. This is now a political attack on religious freedom. Governments hate God, 'cause governments think they're God. Governments don't want you to be loyal to someone or something beyond the government. And so here, God's people wanna gather in worship and the governments around them wanna stop it because they want the loyalty to be to the government, not to God. So what they're trying to do is suppress and stop religious freedom. Does this still happen? All the time. All the time. As God's people, we don't expect people who aren't God's people to live as God's people. But we want the freedom so that we can live as God's people. Here's how we raise our kids. Here's how we pay our bills. Here's how we do our life. You could disagree with us, that's fine you go do what you wanna do. But that's not how God told us to do it. This is an issue of political conflict and

religious liberty. And what do they do? They attack Nehemiah. They ask him, well here's the negative narrative. Are you rebelling against the king? Nehemiah is the leader. You're gonna see this through the book. If you're gonna call the shots, you're gonna take the shots. That's leadership. Anybody is like, I don't like being criticized, then don't plan on leading. You're gonna call the shots, you're gonna take the shots. They single out Nehemiah, are you leading a treasonous rebellion against the king? They're accusing him of criminal behavior, basically being a terrorist, not being a good patriot. And this is a negative narrative. You're treasonous, you're criminal. And the men who are saying this, they are governmental leaders, they have a lot of power, lot of money, they're dangerous. In addition, you'll see later in the book, they send an open letter against Nehemiah. This is like today YouTube, social media posts, blog posts, drive by, Click Bait, fake news, pseudo journalism hate peace. It's nothing new. The times change and the media changes, but the demons don't. So the negative narrative is, actually you're a terrorist committing treason. And what happens when a negative narrative is set, all information is filtered through the negative narrative. From this point forward in Nehemiah, everything he says or does is then weaponized for the negative narrative. They do the same thing to the Lord Jesus. When Jesus comes, he has crowds of people. His enemies and critics don't. You don't read the story in the Bible. You're like thousands came to hear his critics and children gathered around the enemies of Jesus. You don't see that. See because what happens is God creates a crowd and then Satan comes and attacks the leader to try and steal their followers. God here is assembling his people. And then the enemies are going to attack Nehemiah. The Bible says, strike the shepherd and the sheep scatter. That's what they're gonna do. 'Cause see, God doesn't just know the Bible so does Satan. And so ultimately there's this attack on Nehemiah. And the negative narrative is you're a criminal. You know this is treason, you're a terrorist. They do this to Jesus. Jesus is like, I'm God, no, you're a liar and so is your mom. They tag his mom into the negative narrative. Your mom slept around so much you don't even know who your dad is. Well, I healed somebody. Yeah, you healed him on the Sabbath. That was a sin, you broke the rules, you healed him the wrong way. So healing is bad. Okay, well now, not on the Sabbath Jesus heals another guy. They say by the power of Baalzebub, the prince of demons you healed him. You're like, okay, I healed somebody. And you say now I'm demon possessed and the healing is evidence of my demonic powers. So you're saying Jesus is a liar, that Jesus is a sinner and that Jesus is demon possess. Is that true? No, but that's the negative narrative. So that leads to the next principle. If you engage, you will enrage. If they've set a negative narrative, why feed it? I'll give bullets to soldiers, but not terrorists. Why give information to enemies? He says, I replied to them in chapter two, verse 20, The God of heaven will make us prosper. This is between you and God. You know why you hate me? 'Cause you hate him. Really this is between you and Him. Like if you believe the word of God and they don't believe the word of God, they're gonna make it personal don't take it personal. That's what he said, that's between you and him. And his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem. So what he's saying is this, I'm not gonna argue with you. I'm not gonna fight with you. I'm not gonna respond to you. Why? God called me to get some things done. You don't have time for your critics, you don't have time for your enemies. You don't have energy to waste for people who are trying to dissuade you from walking in the will of God. You don't need to hate them, you don't need to attack them, you just need to ignore them, right?

Ultimately, Nehemiah doesn't say, well, let's hug this out. Let's get a mediator. Let's talk about it. Let's compromise. What he says is, I'm busy pound sand. Love Nehemiah. And you're gonna see this through the whole book. Now, what's interesting here, let me just summarize this. Here's Nehemiah, and he is praying about a king to a greater king. Who's the greater king he's praying too? It's Jesus the king of kings. He wants to help rebuild Jerusalem. And he's praying to the king of kings who is at that time ruling and reigning from the new Jerusalem. And ultimately Nehemiah is praying and planning to be part of God's big plan, to bring the king of kings to Jerusalem. This is the storyline of the Bible. The reason that God has Nehemiah work on Jerusalem, rebuild the walls, the gates, the city, the temple, the worship, is because the king of kings needs to get to Jerusalem to fulfill the plan that God has for his people. So ultimately, Jesus goes not from Susa to Jerusalem, but from heaven to Jerusalem. In addition, when he arrives, he passes through the rebuilt gates, in the rebuilt wall to enter into the rebuilt temple. And they threaten to kill Nehemiah. They do kill the Lord Jesus. And the Lord Jesus dies and rises in Israel, just outside of the walls of Jerusalem is where he is crucified and buried. And in so doing, he fulfills everything that is foreshadowing in the temple. So the temple was the presence of God. It was a placeholder until Jesus came and is the presence of God. The priest would offer a sacrifice. And Jesus comes as our great high priest to offer himself as a sacrifice. And ultimately, today we no longer have to go to a place as our headquarters, we go to a person as our head. And ultimately we are in the same season as Nehemiah saying, God, you've got a big purpose. I'm praying and planning about my part. Lord tell me what you would like me to do or give, and let me make a plan to be a part of your big purpose. And Nehemiah's whole ministry was to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the king of kings to Jerusalem. We're now awaiting the second coming of Jesus Christ, the king of kings and he's not just coming to Jerusalem, he's bringing what? He's bringing the new Jerusalem. So you and I are to be following in the example of Nehemiah. Praying, Lord, what do you have to say to me? Planning, what is my part in your purpose? How can I prepare the way for the coming in our situation, the second coming of the Lord, Jesus? Wonder you spend this entire sermon series praying and planning. God, what would you have to say to me? What plans do I need to be making to be part of your purpose? Let me pray and make this real specific in a moment. Father God, thank you for an opportunity to teach. Have a little bit of fun. God thank you for Nehemiah. It's a great story. God, they had a godless government that was opposed to them and religious freedom. God's people were scattered and discouraged. The economy was in decline. The platforms and the media was against them. And God, you found a way to encourage your people, to lead your people, to guide your people, to bless your people, to gather your people. And your hand went before them to protect them. Your hand went with them to lead them and guide them. Your hand went to provide for them, and your hand was blessing constantly over them. God we ask for the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, would you just place the hand of the Father, your presence on us and among us. God, I pray for these dear saints that they would hear from you in praying, that they would walk with you in planning, and that God we would see in our day what begins is a remnant at the beginning of Nehemiah, results in a revival at the end. We pray for that same thing in our day in Jesus good name. Amen.