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How Do You Change Your World? (Part I)

Nehemiah 4:6: (NASB) *So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.*

Everyone wants their world to be better. Everyone has dreams and ideas they see as transformative - even innovative - yet the vast majority of us never do anything about those dreams and ideas to bring them to reality. Why the lack of effort? Because it is hard, because it takes thought, energy and determination and most of us are not convicted enough by our dreams and ideas to be willing to commit all of that effort. Occasionally someone stands apart from this typical reaction and actually thinks, acts, leads and accomplishes their dream or idea. Today we will talk about a little known man in the Old Testament who did just that. His dream was laughable, his mission was ridiculous and his enemies were determined to stop him, yet he focused and fought with all of his being and changed his world in the process!

 **A new game, *The Secret to Transforming Your Dream into Reality*, Dima Ghawi TEDx**

Who was Nehemiah and when did he live?

(Source: McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia) Nehemiah was a descendant of the Jewish population that had been taken captive to Babylon in 587-586 BC. In 539 BC, Cyrus the Persian gained control over all of Mesopotamia. He permitted the Jewish exiles to return to the city of Jerusalem. Nearly a century later in Nehemiah's time, the Persian ruler was Artaxerxes I Longimanus (ruled 465-424 BC). Nehemiah was his personal cupbearer...

The character of Nehemiah is easy to determine.

First, he was meticulous in ordering details which would indicate a man who paid very close attention to staying true to truth. Second, he was obvious in his loyalty to God and His chosen people. This played an enormous role in his ability to change his world: Nehemiah 1:1-4:

Who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach - The Jews there were being looked down upon by those around them and the city was destroyed. This devastated Nehemiah because Jerusalem was God's city.

Nehemiah's prayer will further reveal the depth of his already alluded to faithful and godly nature. He was all about God's will, God's way and God's people.

Being the cupbearer to the king was an important job. Nehemiah had to make sure the king's wine was drinkable and healthy.

 **Practicing, *The Secret to Transforming Your Dream into Reality*, Dima Ghawi, TEDx**

"Change Your World" Process: Find your noble passion.

We cannot expect to ever change anything unless we are focused on something of such high value that it dominates our very being. With nobility comes integrity. With integrity comes a bigger picture including the people around you.

This was the kind of passion Nehemiah had going into this prayer: Nehemiah 1:5-7: He started with sincere praise before starting the details. *I and my father's house have sinned* - he honestly acknowledged they were not worthy of God's honor or blessing. Any passion that captures true nobility is based in *boldly expressed humility*. The greatest leadership comes from the greatest humility.

**Nehemiah is clearly pleading with God.
Is he about to tell God what he wants God to do for him?**

In today's Christian world, it is a common thing for some to go before God with detailed instructions in hand for God's blessing. Nehemiah's boldness was nothing like that. As we will see, Nehemiah was boldly reciting the facts of Israel's sin first, and he will continue to recite the facts of God's promises second.

Nehemiah is laying the groundwork to change the world, to lead multitudes of people to actions that on the outside look ridiculous.

People do not respond unless the trumpet is loud, clear and definitive. We will soon see Nehemiah was that trumpet.



))) The secret, *The Secret to Transforming Your Dream into Reality, Dima Ghawi, TEDx*

Having unequivocally found his passion, Nehemiah now seeks to make it his purpose!

"Change Your World" Process: Press your passion into personal purpose.

We now go back to Nehemiah's prayer. Notice how it deepens in spirituality and personal vulnerability: Nehemiah 1:8-11: Nehemiah knew his Scriptures, quoting Deuteronomy 30:1-5 back to God. He knew God's promises and the underlying principle that disobedience would mean the people would be scattered. *Scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens* - The New International Version says *in the past the farthest horizon, or out of sight*. Heavens in Scripture can represent governments or nations. The idea is they would be scattered, under the control of other people in faraway places. Regathering becomes almost impossible.

Nehemiah reasons before God that action can appropriately be taken without violating His principles so long as the people are willing to go back to God. God had promised He would take them back! This was bold on Nehemiah's part.

I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name - Nehemiah would not be so bold to say this about himself if it were not true. He had a noble passion.

Nehemiah was asking for God to be with him and bless him in his desire for God's people, God's land and God's purposes. Nehemiah wanted to do more and asked for the opportunity to help and show his faithfulness!

God has a way of testing our passion and personal purpose with the passage of time. Often we get a godly idea but we do not follow through. Time went by before Nehemiah could react, but he did not lose the passion.

))) Symbol and empowerment, *The Secret to Transforming Your Dream, Dima Ghawi, TEDx*

It was about four months later that Nehemiah's actual opportunity came. His passion and purpose were still in place: Nehemiah 2:1-6: He honestly tells the king everything, which was a risk. He was sad because God's city lay desolate. Here was bold humility once again - this time before the pagan king who could open opportunity's door. He was afraid but did it anyway. Four months after hearing the news, the opportunity arises to mention it to the king, who is very magnanimous. *So I prayed to the God of heaven* - he prayed first. Obviously the king had an affinity towards Nehemiah. *I gave him a definite time* - how would Nehemiah know how long he would be gone? We aren't sure! Maybe he gave him an estimated span of time, let's say, one year, and then went back to "renew" his time off.

You know your passion is your own personal purpose when you are willing to step out of everything comfortable and walk through the door of uncertainty into the outside world of possibility!

Nehemiah is going! Is this going to be like a fact-finding tour full of observations and information?

Again, if we were to put Nehemiah in today's world it would be all about gathering information. But Nehemiah was not in today's world, and as we are about to see, he was SO MUCH MORE PREPARED ahead of time than we would have imagined! This is an inkling of what it takes to change your world!

))) Uncle, friend or foe, *The Secret to Transforming Your Dream, Dima Ghawi, TEDx*

Continuing his conversation with the king, Nehemiah expresses his well thought out needs to accomplish what looks like an impossibility: Nehemiah 2:7-10: From his very first hearing of the broken down city of Jerusalem to the opportunity to find passage and provisions for the job, Nehemiah had his mind and heart fixed squarely on God. It is interesting that when the king said he could go, Nehemiah did not just stop with that. He gave the king a well-thought out list of what was needed to proceed.

))) From deflated to decisive, *The Secret to Transforming Your Dream, Dima Ghawi, TEDx*

Nehemiah, cupbearer to the king, is off to Jerusalem to survey and begin his work of praise to God. Obviously the king believed in Nehemiah, at the very least as a man of great value and



integrity, because the king sent an entourage of army officers and horsemen to assure Nehemiah's safe passage and representation of the king.

The sons of Israel - remember, the people were *downtrodden and under great reproach*. This was the first hint of the absolute danger and difficulty he would encounter with his work.

To be a “Nehemiah” is not a common thing. What do we do if we are not that person? To **PRESS YOUR PASSION INTO PERSONAL PURPOSE** is a task that is not for the faint of heart. Not everyone is necessarily cut out for this kind of role. What do you do if you are not a Nehemiah? You find a “Nehemiah” and walk and work with that Nehemiah and you CAN change your world! It does not have to be on the scale of a Martin Luther King Jr., but simply within the context of something you are passionate about.

Nehemiah 2:11-16: Right from the start Nehemiah shared parts of his task with those he could trust. These few individuals helped Nehemiah. There was so much refuse and rubble of destruction that his horse could not safely pass through.

Nehemiah's personal purpose was to understand, solve, inform and lead - change the world!

**It is great to have such a passion and purpose,
but how do you get others to buy into your plan?**

“Change Your World” Process: Pass your passion and purpose on to the right people.

The whole idea of changing your world by very definition is predicated on the need for massive effort, cooperation and co-laboring. These things are not common commodities and that is why we need people like Nehemiah to be the first to step up and step out of normal thinking and activity. Any truly noble passion for change cannot ever be accomplished without the engaged and dedicated help of others.

Now Nehemiah lays out the reality, the plan and the overruling of God Almighty: **Nehemiah 2:17-20:** Nehemiah's passion must have been palpable! He engages others who had influence with three simple steps: 1. He lays out the hopelessness and therefore the challenge - the walls of God's city are in ruins! 2. He lays out the bold initiative - let US rebuild them and remove reproach from God's city. 3. He lays out why this impossible task is possible - God has blessed him and the King is on board!

 **Father's Interference, *The Secret to Transforming Your Dream*, Dima Ghawi, TEDx**

Someone once said “no good deed goes unpunished.” In the midst of the planning and prep stages, the enemies of God once again rise up to threaten and stifle the effort:

¹⁹But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king? Literally, they threatened, ridiculed and disdained Nehemiah and company. This was the start of a big challenge he would have to deal with. ²⁰So I answered them and said to them, The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem. Nehemiah speaks a powerful answer - God has this, you have no authority and Jerusalem is not yours! He originally told his Jewish allies that his (Nehemiah's) God was with this task. Here he tells his enemies that THEIR God (He and his believing Jewish kin) will see them through. Nehemiah understood the power of the right people to execute the purpose.

 **Graduation, *The Secret to Transforming Your Dream*, Dima Ghawi, TEDx**

The work very specifically begins with those who have deeply committed themselves: **Nehemiah 3:1:** Why this particular family first? Why start here?

(Source: Biblical commentary by John Gill) *Eliashib* - This was the grandson of...Joshua the high priest, his father's name was Joiakim, Nehemiah 12:10, being high priest, and rising first, he set a good example both to the priests and to the people, and served no doubt greatly to animate and encourage them.

He had the high priest doing this work first to make a statement. This is the one whom the locals already looked up to and respected before Nehemiah arrived, and he was thoroughly on board.



(Source: Biblical commentary by Matthew Poole) *They builded the sheep-gate - where the sheep were washed, and then brought to the temple to be sacrificed.*

Anything of spiritual value, for us as Christians, has to be built around the will of God through Jesus Christ. John 1:29: (KJV) Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. What a beautiful illustration of Jesus! He first rebuilt the Sheep Gate because that is where the sheep are washed and brought for sacrifice. Without that gate, that process, we have nothing.

Nehemiah not only gets the work started, but he chooses the right person, the one whom the locals already respected. Then he chooses the right gate - the one that gave the most power, because it was about Temple sacrifices. The priority of serving God cannot be underestimated, and Nehemiah made sure his team saw that. The changing of one's world is never small or easy. Remember the piles of rubble? Think about the mass and height the wall would require to be secure. Nehemiah seems to be moving forward with a steady confidence in God's will, brilliant foresight, an energy that is contagious and a wisdom for the ages. He was definitely the right man for the job! Again, everybody cannot be a "Nehemiah." But you can *find* a Nehemiah and attach yourself to a noble, godly passion, pouring yourself into it. Allow your Nehemiah to help you help him or her change the world around you by elevating godliness and spirituality.

"Change Your World" Process: Practice your passion and purpose with urgency.

One of the very hardest aspects of changing your world is to engage others with the same ownership that you have. Nehemiah used some very simple and godly principles to accomplish this: Family and ownership.

 **Belief to reality, *The Secret to Transforming Your Dream, Dima Ghawi, TEDx***

Nehemiah 3 is a long and detailed list of who did what. We will soon drop in on this list here and there to see the strategy that Nehemiah employed to maintain the urgency required to succeed.

 **Dream come true, *The Secret to Transforming Your Dream, Dima Ghawi, TEDx***

Dima's life is built around empowering others to find a way to become educated to have choices in life. She is giving what she was given and that is the power of changing her world. She honored her grandmother for giving her the vision; Nehemiah honored God for everything that has taken place.

The first element of the strategy was to attain and maintain urgency and quality:

Nehemiah 3:2-5: These are the men of Jericho. Nehemiah put people to work with their families and associates, people they already knew. This way efficiency and cooperation came more easily, because they cared about each other. **Second element to keeping the urgency:** Nehemiah 3:17-18: Put the people to work where they have authority. Officials were put to work on the portion of the wall outside of their own district. This yields a greater sense of value to your own section. This difficult and tedious work would mean something to those individuals. **Third element to keeping the urgency:** Nehemiah 3:23,28-30: Put the people to work where the wall protects their own house. This insured high quality work! Think of all the questions Nehemiah would have had to ask in order to know where to put the people to work. Where are you from? What do you do? Where do you live? Do you have any authority? He did all the work ahead of time (without a database!), talking to all of these people. The greatness of his desire to change the world engaged every single person in a unique way. He put his own purpose of urgency into their hearts. Brilliant!

What do we have so far? We have a mighty crew of workers, each with their own motivation to repair Jerusalem for the sake of God first and for the sake of their own heritage and protection second. What's coming? Threats, fear, doubt, internal strife - typical issues that come with changing your world! Nehemiah set himself to be successful by understanding the work, understanding the people, praying at every turn to focus on God's will. Together they will do a miraculous thing!

***So, how do you change your world?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***