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How Do You Change Your World? (Part II)

Nehemiah 8:10: (NASB) ...for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.



Last week we began talking about what it takes to actually change the world around you - what it takes to not only have a dream for change but to begin that process of change. We talked about Nehemiah, a little-known figure in the Old Testament who not only had a ridiculously big dream for change, he worked on the idea and recruited the masses to help him progress towards making that dream a reality. Today, we finish the story as we catalogue the principles and techniques Nehemiah used to accomplish what seemed impossible. Not only did Nehemiah achieve something magnificent, he also left clues and tools along the way for us to pick up on and use, to apply to the changes we want to affect in our own lives.

 **Greatness in all of us, *Dream - Motivational Video, Mateusz M***

Nehemiah lived about 100 years after the period of Israel's captivity in which Cyrus the Persian allowed Jews to go back to their land. In Nehemiah's time, the Persian ruler was Artaxerxes I Longimanus (ruled 465-424 BC). Nehemiah was his personal cupbearer.

We discussed the character of Nehemiah. First, he was meticulous in ordering details which would indicate a man who paid very close attention to staying true to truth: Nehemiah 1:1-2

Second, he was obvious in his loyalty and that loyalty was to God Almighty and His chosen people: Nehemiah 1:3-4

A problem with leadership today is mixed agendas - personal agendas conflict with the agenda of helping others. Nehemiah avoided any personal agenda.

Please see the CQ podcast from November 27, 2017, "How Do You Change Your world? (Part I)."

"Change Your World" Processes we discussed in Part I: Find your noble passion, press your passion into personal purpose, pass your passion and purpose on to the right people, and practice your passion and purpose with urgency.

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 is coming? Threats, fear, doubt, internal strife - typical issues that come with changing your world!

It is one thing to have a vision, act on it, share it with others and get them on board with you. It is an entirely different thing to face serious trouble in this process. Trouble brings any leader to the crossroad of fight or flight, and this is where the leader's character and mission are tested at a whole new level. He had a single focus to honor the Lord in everything he did. What inspiration!

 **Most people stop, *Dream - Motivational Video, Mateusz M***

Nehemiah took risks. He was a cupbearer for the king and was now starting a giant construction project. Even asking the king for the time off and a list of materials was a risk!

"Change Your World" Process: Power through enemy adversity with defiance and mutual ownership.

The truest test of leadership and the buy-in of those following is trouble - lots of trouble.

The rising up of controversy and insult as they begin to rebuild the wall: Nehemiah 4:1-6: To this point the Jews had been merely annoying - now they were a cause for heckling and anger. The enemies mocked and insulted Nehemiah and the people, trying to demean them. If the people were weak, this could get to them, wearing them away little by little. No one is immune to criticism.

The people heard the heckling and threats and were shaken, so Nehemiah prays for their strength: *Do not forgive their iniquity* - why was this an appropriate prayer? They were demoralizing the builders who were doing God's work. He was asking for justice for their behavior that stood directly against God. Powering through enemy adversity is best fueled with sincere prayer for God's protective hand! *So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.* Even though they were



shaken by the talk, they *had a mind to work*. The people were a unified and defiant force as they spurred one another on in their difficult and now obviously dangerous work. One reason they were unified was because families were working together on the section of the wall outside of their own houses. He got them working for personal reasons.

The progress just aggravated Sanballat and his minions.

Heckling and insult now become a serious threat of attack: Nehemiah 4:7-14: Now the Jewish effort is becoming a threat. **To power through enemy adversity with defiance and mutual ownership, Nehemiah knew to always go back to his original source of strength - PRAYER:** *The strength of the burden bearers is failing* - the word on the street was the people were getting tired; doubts were rising. The enemies plotted to surround the people. The Jews who lived nearby heard ten different times that the enemies would *come up against us from every place where you may turn*. Tensions continued to mount as the people began to lose heart. Nehemiah reacted decisively. Families together would fight hard to protect each other. Guards were put around the outside edge of the wall while the work was going on. Nehemiah was intuitive. He kept watching the people and saw their fears. He continually reminded their leaders it is God Almighty overseeing the work and who they are honoring. *And fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses* - this is a fight first and foremost for God, but also for you and the very place you live. Defy the evil! Defy the darkness! *Resist the devil and he will flee from you!* Our strongest power and defiance against any enemy is based on faith in God's protection, coupled with our willingness to stand and fight for that which we have committed to.

We have not yet seen how Nehemiah's decisive faith and action countered the enemy's plans and already we are looking at other potential issues - this time from within. Anyone who has the audacity to try and change their world will inevitably be faced simultaneously with multiple issues.

Nehemiah 4:15-23: They now adjusted the work plan. Half of the people did the work and half of the people carried their weaponry. For those working directly on the wall, they bore their loads one-handed with their swords in the other hand. Each builder wore his sword with a trumpeter nearby. Everyone was armed and ready but still working. This made the work difficult but *the people had a mind to work*. Now defiance really started kicking in.

From dawn to dusk every day, powering through required tactical leadership! This gave the enemy cause for concern. No more could they be taken off-guard, because the workers were ready. Attacking would meet with great resistance.

The people had to power through enemy adversity with defiance and mutual ownership! **There is no better way than by example:** ²²*At that time I also said to the people, Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day.* ²³*So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water.*

People slept at work, always ready. Nehemiah personally lived the change and sacrifice he wanted to see. This is what we can do, setting a high example to give others strength.



Everyone won't see it, *Dream - Motivational Video, Mateusz M*

Nehemiah taught the people how to be unstoppable.

"Change Your World" Process: Persevere through internal strife and external traps

Within the body of Christ we have trials and challenges, but it helps create more growth in Christ by working through disagreements in a Christian way. If you want to change your world, you cannot bring your old world with you. We will have friction if we stretch ourselves, but we can do it with godly principles, just like Nehemiah did.

External trouble and threats are significant, but internal trouble and strife are in many ways worse. To change your world requires wisdom, focus and a "follow what I do" approach.

So many were engaged in this work that food supply problems were compounded on top of a lack of rain: Nehemiah 5:1-12: There was an enemy around them but now different groups of people internally were starting to murmur. When that happens, distrust can start fostering.



⁶Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. Much of their issues stemmed from some caring for themselves at the expense of others.

Nehemiah perseveres through the internal strife with brutal honesty and personal example: They mortgaged themselves to others to be indentured servants. *We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations* - "While you are taking care of your own pocketbook, I have been sending emissaries to surrounding nations and personally buying the freedom of other Jews to help us rebuild God's city. You are re-enslaving our own people while I am buying them back out of slavery?" Nehemiah set an example so high that when they found out what he was doing, they literally were speechless.

(Source: Bible commentary by Albert Barnes) Nehemiah had spent money in redeeming some countrymen in servitude among the pagan; they were causing others to be sold into slavery among the Jews.

It is always necessary with internal crisis that the leader be able to step up and calm everyone to the point of re-engaging their ability to listen. Nehemiah cut right through all points of view to the vital core of the matter which was that they all desperately needed each other more than they needed their own personal comfort and advantage.

Once again, the power of Nehemiah's devotion to righteousness and God shows the way: Nehemiah 5:10-12: *The hundredth part of the money* - the people were charging each other interest. We are all engaged in changing our world. If you own it the way I own it, we can dedicate all of ourselves to the cause. We should not make a nickel off our brethren. Our godly cause is more important than our bank account. Nehemiah changed their perspective based on his own godly example. Not only did he stem the tide of disunity and ill will, he reversed it! He changed their world!



I must see it for myself, *Dream - Motivational Video, Mateusz M*

Nehemiah 5:14-16: Governors before him made it burdensome for the people because they were looking to get paid, but not Nehemiah. While the work on the wall was going on, he did not take anything from anyone because he saw God as a giving, blessing God. He took the principle of God giving and blessing others and did not take from others. Working as the king's cupbearer seems to have been a job that made him wealthy. He could have become a powerful landowner but did not.

The example of Nehemiah could not go unnoticed, and the whole governing process changed in accordance with Nehemiah's high standards of serving God first and the people second.

With the internal strife dissolved, the work went on. Nehemiah would again be externally tested: Nehemiah 6:1-9

If Nehemiah is a threat to you and refuses to take the bait, what do you do next? Invent fake news! The enemies made up stories about what was allegedly being spread around. "Why, this news is damaging to you, Nehemiah! We had better talk..." They created stories so he would be nervous and could destroy the leadership that held the people together. His resolve was strong. Yet another trap follows this attempt regarding taking sanctuary in the Temple.

(Please see CQ Rewind Full Edition Bonus Material for this part of the story.)

The glaring truth of this whole world-changing process is: Nehemiah was so deeply entrenched in honoring God, serving God's people and city that he was utterly immovable by fear or temptation.

To achieve lasting success in changing anyone's world requires long-term, heartfelt, uncompromising devotion to that change by those who lead. This example must be public for it to be powerful.

Nehemiah proved to be such an example and the fruits of his godly efforts are stunning: Nehemiah 6:15-16: *The people had a mind to work* and a leader who kept their minds on the work. Nehemiah constantly prayed, looked to God for direction and gave God praise. This spread out to others and even their enemies saw that God was with them. But even with this result, more threats were sent to Nehemiah! (Please see CQ Rewind Full Edition Bonus Material for this part of the story.)



It's not over until, *Dream - Motivational Video, Mateusz M*



"Change Your World" Process: Ponder, pray and praise - the joy of the Lord is your strength. Live the change of your original noble and godly passion and in so doing, you will see that *the joy of the Lord is your strength*.

Nehemiah now turns things over to the prophet Ezra, as that is the appropriate action of a great leader. The prophet was God's spiritual representative. Nehemiah was a tool to do the physical work. He did not have pride; he had honor for God's will.

Now witness the transforming power of having your world changed towards godliness:
Nehemiah 8:1-12: *Gathered as one man* - such unity! After accomplishing what looked like a miracle by their own hands and God's providence, the people are now captivated by their God and His laws!

Ponder! The value of godliness is planted...

Listening to God's word from your heart invokes the need and desire to *Pray! The value of godliness takes root...*

The people wept out loud hearing the Law because they realized how far off they had been. Ezra explained that today was a day of praise not of weeping. They were to just take in the goodness of God as a set apart, holy day. *The joy of the LORD is your strength*.

Absorbing God's word and blessing invokes *Praise! The value of godliness blossoms!*

...¹²All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

They took Ezra's advice and had a great day of celebration. Ezra and the priesthood (with Nehemiah's help) would go on to re-establish Israel's religious identity.

This leader, Nehemiah, showed the people of Israel how to change their world. He showed persistence, clarity and how to always do the will of God. Put that in your heart and change your world. Work on noble, godly projects.

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