

SESSION 9

DO YOUR APPOINTED PART

God uses each of His covenant people to accomplish His purposes.





“FOR THOSE WHO HAVE
EVER QUESTIONED
WHETHER A SINGLE,
OR EVEN MULTIPLE,
FAILURES HAVE
DISQUALIFIED THEM
FROM GOD’S USE, I
HAVE A WORD FOR
YOU: IT’S NOT TOO LATE
FOR GOD’S UNLIKELY
PATH TO SUCCESS.”

—*Dr. Tony Evans*

EVER MARVELED AT THE ROLE SOCIAL MEDIA PLAYS IN OUR WORLD TODAY? WHO WOULD’VE IMAGINED EVEN A DECADE AGO THAT SUCH A PHENOMENON COULD HELP OVERTHROW DICTATORS, BRING TERRORISTS TO JUSTICE, OR SWING MAJOR ELECTIONS? SOCIAL MEDIA MEANS WORLDWIDE CONNECTIVITY FOR MILLIONS OF HUMAN BEINGS.

In one sense, the success of social media shouldn’t surprise us. We are intensely social creatures. God made us that way (see Genesis 2:18). We also learn rather quickly by experience that major achievements are rarely the result of a single person working in isolation. As the writer of Ecclesiastes pointed out, “Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

Some tasks require the effort, coordination, and strength of many people working together. Ask any winning team, successful corporation, or growing church. A team working together can win championships. Coworkers focused on the same goals can outperform any one person. Likewise, a church in which all members serve by using their God-given gifts can effectively do their part in fulfilling Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations.

Nehemiah challenged individuals in his day to do their part in God’s kingdom work. Everyone was needed. Everyone had a part.

➤ NEHEMIAH 7:1-8

1 When the wall had been rebuilt and I had the doors installed, the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites were appointed. **2** Then I put my brother Hanani in charge of Jerusalem, along with Hananiah, commander of the fortress, because he was a faithful man who feared God more than most. **3** I said to them, “Do not open the gates of Jerusalem until the sun is hot, and let the doors be shut and securely fastened while the guards are on duty. Station the citizens of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some at their homes.” **4** The city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and no houses had been built yet. **5** Then my God put it into my mind to assemble the nobles, the officials, and the people to be registered by genealogy. I found the genealogical record of those who came back first, and I found the following written in it: **6** These are the people of the province who went up among the captive exiles deported by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Each of them returned to Jerusalem and Judah, to his own town. **7** They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah. The number of the Israelite men included: **8** Parosh’s descendants 2,172 [...].

Think About It

Circle the descriptions of Jerusalem’s physical structures and their condition.

Underline the steps taken by Nehemiah once the city’s wall was rebuilt.

In what ways did Nehemiah get others involved in the work?

► UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

After Nehemiah and the restored Jewish community completed the great wall around the city of Jerusalem, they realized the city had only a few residents. A city with no people could hardly be celebrated as “restored.” It didn’t make sense, and wasn’t what God intended. The “holy city” needed lots of holy residents (see Nehemiah 11:1).

Much of the workforce Nehemiah had called into action to build the wall actually lived in the surrounding regions of Judah. Chapter 3 reveals that workers from other areas came together with the inhabitants of Jerusalem to accomplish this work. Everyone had a job to do. But when the work was completed, most of the workers expected to return to their homes outside the city.

Nehemiah again displayed his God-given leadership qualities. He organized the city’s administration and then set about to repopulate the city. God gave him a plan for that work. The plan is described in Nehemiah 11, a plan whereby all the surrounding towns and families enlisted ten percent of their members to relocate to Jerusalem.



➤ EXPLORE THE TEXT

A ROLE TO PLAY (Nehemiah 7:1-3)

The Jews had accomplished a major feat in building the wall in a short period of time. Their construction role was finished; now their other roles back home needed to be resumed. Like a city that loses a major job-creating business, Jerusalem was about to face a whole new set of challenges.

Nehemiah took immediate action to strengthen the religious and civil organization within Jerusalem. First, the city and its temple needed a trustworthy security operation. *Gatekeepers* were guardians of the city gates and thereby controlled access to the city. Usually, the gatekeepers were watchmen or soldiers for the temple entrances, but Nehemiah extended their responsibilities to include the gates in the city wall. The gatekeepers essentially provided security for worshipers entering the temple.

Second, the city needed spiritual organization. So Nehemiah appointed temple singers to lead the community in the worship of God. He reminded the people that life was more than work. He appointed the singers to help worshipers make God their highest priority within the community.

Third, the city needed the regular, effective teaching of God's Word. Thus Nehemiah installed the Levites to help instruct the people. Historically, the Levites often proved themselves to be devoted to God and His Word (see Exodus 32:26-29). They were consecrated to God, performing duties that included preparation for sacrifices, administrative responsibilities, and teaching people the Scriptures.

In what ways do you see security and spiritual organization modeled in your church?



KEY DOCTRINE:

Cooperation

Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom.

GOD WANTS
TO USE ALL OF
HIS PEOPLE TO
ACCOMPLISH HIS
PURPOSES.

Nehemiah had promised the king of Persia that he would return to his duties in Susa at a definite time (see Nehemiah 2:6). Yet, he didn't want to leave Jerusalem without putting in place a trustworthy civic organization to complement the spiritual organization. So he made two additional key appointments.

- Hanani was Nehemiah's brother. He was among the group who first came to Susa to tell Nehemiah about Jerusalem's state of disgrace. Hanani's passionate concern for the city helped set in motion the whole course of Nehemiah's actions (see 1:2-3). Thus any hint of bias here would be unfounded. Hanani was a man of courage and faith. He was a fit leader to be in charge of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah appointed •Hananiah, the commander of Jerusalem's security forces, to serve alongside his brother. Hananiah would contribute strong military skills to keep the city protected from its enemies. But Hananiah, like Hanani, also possessed spiritual qualities that made him stand out above other potential leaders. Hananiah was a man of integrity. Both of these men, working together, would help ensure continued blessing for God's people where once there had been disgrace.

List qualities you expect in public officials. Would you expect the same or different qualities for church leaders?

The wall would be no guarantee of protection if its gates were left open and unguarded. So Nehemiah gave careful instructions to Hanani and Hananiah regarding the gates. First, Nehemiah instructed that the gates into the city should not be opened *until the sun is hot*. In other words, except in broad daylight all entrances to the city were to remain closed and barred. Enemies often attacked a walled city in the predawn hours when its defenses might be least prepared.

Another vulnerable time for a city was at midday. In many hot, arid areas of the world—both in ancient times as well as today—people

utilized the hottest part of the day as a resting period. Determined enemies could take advantage of that knowledge to gain the element of surprise.

Nehemiah appointed two kinds of guards for the city. The first were the official guards—the gatekeepers who patrolled the wall at specific stations. A second kind were more along the lines of citizen patrols. Residents of the city were appointed to keep watch near their homes. The wisdom in this approach is clear. Citizens mounted the wall opposite their houses, rotating the duty so that someone would be on guard at all times. Nehemiah had used a similar strategy during the wall's construction phase (see 4:13).

What roles can each person in your group play in guarding the group's well-being?

A PLACE TO BELONG (Nehemiah 7:4-8)

The city was extremely vulnerable to attacks without permanent residents. For years, Jerusalem had lay in ruins and was largely uninhabited. Evidently the returning exiles preferred to settle in the outlying areas that offered more stability, security, and land for cultivation. The statement *no houses had been built* means that no new houses had been constructed during or after the rebuilding of the wall.

In an effort to recruit families to relocate inside the city wall, Nehemiah assembled the people for a census. God had put an idea into his mind as to how the dilemma could be solved. Nehemiah faithfully prayed for God's wisdom and strength, and God was faithful to provide for Nehemiah (compare John 14:12-14).

The task of repopulating Jerusalem would not be easy. Nehemiah was no longer organizing a temporary work force; he was now asking people to uproot from familiar surroundings and move to a new locale—a place that required vigilance against danger. It would be a sacrifice for people to make such a move.

Bible Skill:
Use a Bible atlas (print version or on the Internet) to learn about places mentioned in Scripture.

Find a map showing the city walls of Jerusalem. Pay attention to the wall boundaries during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, comparing the boundaries to earlier and later boundaries.

List below how the various boundaries help you understand the history of this city?

Nehemiah assembled the tribal leaders, officials, and the people for the purpose of working out a plan. The plan, described in greater detail in Nehemiah 11:1-2, called for ten percent of the local population to relocate inside the city. The plan was not coercive in nature; those who relocated appear to have done so voluntarily and with the knowledge they were part of something greater than them.

To recruit the volunteers, Nehemiah used a copy of a genealogical record he discovered. It was the list of all the families and groups who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. Genealogies linked the Jews not only to the heritage of their past but also to the hope for their future. Nehemiah wanted to repopulate Jerusalem with citizens who knew they were Jews and were proud of it.

Describe things about your past that make you who you are today.

The word *province* refers to Judah rather than to Babylon. Each of the family groups returned to its original lands. Doing so emphasized the continuing link between the former covenant community of Israel with the restored exiles. The people reaffirmed their past roots, connecting them with their present hopes.

The lengthy list of names represents over forty thousand returnees. (The list is nearly identical to a list in Ezra 2.) The importance of the names emphasize every believer's role in God's kingdom work. God wants to use all of His people to accomplish His purposes.

➤ OBEY THE TEXT

God continues to call His people to do kingdom work. Each role or responsibility carried out by a believer is important in the advancement of the gospel.

What role do you believe God wants you to fulfill in His service? What steps do you need to take to start or improve doing your part?

List actions that characterize a healthy Bible study group. Determine as a group the actions that need to be strengthened in your group.

In what specific ways can you use your gifts and talents as a young adult to advance the gospel?



MEMORIZE

There is profit in all hard work, but endless talk leads only to poverty.— Proverbs 14:23



Use the space provided to make observations and record prayer requests during the group experience for this session.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights gained and questions to discuss during the group experience.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

MY MISSION

Acknowledge ways you will obey God's Word this week.
