

Episode 020

The Challenges Of Rising Up

Introduction

I want to share from Neh 2:12-20 The Challenges Of Rising Up. Nehemiah rose up with the call of God to lead the Israelites to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. But in doing so he faced many challenges. Nevertheless, he overcame those challenges as he inspired and lead the people to rise up.

There are some key lessons we can learn from Nehemiah. Firstly, about some of the challenges he faced that are relevant to us today.

1. Facing uncertainty (v12-15)

“12 I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem...13 By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire.”

Nehemiah was confronted with uncertainty. Even with permission from the Persian King Artaxerxes, he had never seen the broken-down walls and what might be involved in rebuilding it. He made plans despite the uncertainties. Nehemiah wanted to better understand what the challenges of rebuilding the wall might be. So he had to check it out for himself. Nehemiah had unexpected challenges crop up. Like discovering the nobles were exacting a high interest rate for debts. Causing the poor to be enslaved etc.

There is much greater uncertainty now due to turbulent times. External uncertainties include COVID pandemic, war, economy crisis, climate change etc. Internal uncertainties like our people's resilience, health, faith. But we should never let uncertainty stop us. After all faith is spelt risk. Risk is taking steps forward in the midst of uncertainty. We are not talking about rash risk-taking. But a God-led risk taking.



2. Facing inertia, resistance to change (v16)

“The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.”

When Nehemiah went to Jerusalem around 444BC, it was 90+ years since the first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. For 90+ years they lived with broken down walls. They just did not have enough strength to rebuild the walls. It became an accepted part of their lives. Many were resigned to that fact.

Our people, our church, maybe even ourselves - could be in a rut. Maybe we begin to accept that our church, our people are just not that good at winning souls. Or that disciple-making is too hard. Or that church-planting is simply not what we can do. Or maybe our people are simply not that spiritual.

Compromise is when we accept an unacceptable situation. Instead, I pray that God will stir in us a holy discontent. To rise up against a situation unacceptable before God. To say, “This is not good enough. God help us! God help me to change the situation.” That was what Nehemiah felt! Whenever we change gears, change course, transition – there is always inertia. It is always challenging.

Nehemiah faced that. Yet Nehemiah was used of God to stir up the faith of the people. That they did not have to accept broken walls. That they could rebuild the walls! We can be the same. To stir our people up in God.



3. Facing opposition (v19)

“But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. “What is this you are doing?” they asked. “Are you rebelling against the king?”

Nehemiah faced strong opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem. Later, he realised that there was a fifth column. People inside who were secretly opposed to him due to their connections with Sanballat. Neh 6:10-14

When we seek to do more of God's work, more opposition will arise. We will face opposition definitely from the Enemy. He will oppose us directly. He will also oppose us internally through those inside as well. The more we rise up in God's purposes, the more the Enemy will oppose us. The bigger the purpose, the bigger the opposition, the bigger the demons.

The more we resonate with God's heart, the more the Enemy seeks to dampen our heart. The more we seek to run with God, the more the Enemy seeks to pull the rug from under our feet. We either retreat, or we fight back!



From Nehemiah, we also learn what we need:

1. Wisdom to apply the most appropriate approach (v11-16)

Nehemiah wisely inspected the ruins of the walls so that he could understand the scope of the project needed to rebuild the walls. We need to understand the real causes. What are the uncertainties? Why is there inertia? Why is there opposition? Because we can only properly address issues when we better understand the root causes. If you take the wrong medicine, you will not cure the health issue.

Some quick tips on dealing with uncertainties.

Firstly, we must increase resilience and flexibility in our people and our church. So we can handle the greater uncertainties, the increased amount of changes needed. So that we can handle lockdowns better, economic shocks, etc.

Secondly, anticipate the uncertainties as best you can and plan contingencies.

Thirdly, trust God for outcomes even as you do all that you can.

Some quick tips for dealing with inertia.

Firstly, understand that not everybody can change gears or want to. We need to know the difference. Some cannot change gears due to their situation. Perhaps they have health issues, or family issues. Hence they cannot make the changes yet. That is different to those that refuse to or are afraid to.

Secondly, approach these differently and appropriately. Those that cannot - they need our support. Those that are afraid, they need our encouragement. Those that they don't want to, they need God's touch to change their hearts. Mentee's family challenge and how we helped.



2. Faith to trust God for greater things (v17-18a)

“17 Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”

18 I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me.”

Faith is always critical because it turns our focus to God rather than upon the difficult situation. God who is the master of turning around impossible situations. Faith is crucial to respond to God's leading, to God's solution. God's solution is not always convenient. God's solution may seem even more impossible than the current impossible situation.

Reinhard Bonnke and tent to seat 34,000 in Cape Peninsula in South Africa. It was as big as 3 American football fields. But the tent was destroyed. Yet God turned it around to enable even more to attend the rally.

Faith to start our church with only a few months of work visa left. As we did not have a PR visa.

Faith to reach out to Africa despite having nothing more than God's leading and only 1 pastor who was interested to work with us.

3. Unity to move the church forward together (v18b)

“They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.”

When the people rallied around Nehemiah and united behind his call to rebuild the walls - they achieve in 52 days what they could not in 90+ years! Unity is crucial amongst leadership then the membership – to move the church forward.



Some quick tips to build unity:

Firstly, you and your team need credibility. To be trusted.

Secondly, put forward a compelling and inspirational case for what needs to be done. I shared much more being inspirational in my Leadership podcasts in wilsonlailing.com.

Thirdly, address the concerns and doubts properly.

Fourthly, invite all to partner in the dream. Don't force or push people, you will only push them away.

Unidus Community Centre was a huge financial undertaking. But it was possible because our leaders were united in the vision and got the church behind us.

4. Courage to face the challenges (v20)

“I answered them by saying, “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.”

Nehemiah was confronted by his enemies. But he had the courage to stare them down! Because he trusted in God. Because he did not allow fear to overtake him, he was able to walk all the way with God to achieve the miracle of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and more! We must not let fear take hold of our hearts. Because fear is the enemy of faith. It quenches it. Fear robs us not only of our faith but also of our energy and clarity. It puts a fog over us and bogs us down. That is why I absolutely refuse to let fear take hold of my heart.



Almost 2 decades ago, I was very ill. My very high temperature refused to come down. I was in hospital. They were pumping antibiotics into me. The antibiotics were not working. They finally confirmed I had Legionnaires disease. One of my medical students told me that 1 in 10 die from Legionnaires disease. That is much worse than COVID. Not very encouraging. But I refused to let fear into my heart. Trusted God. In my heart I remembered the prophecy that I would see the hunk of the harvest! I remembered my young family! Let faith arise above the fears and squash it!

Conclusion

We have a huge decade on front of us. In God, we will make a tremendous difference by Transforming Lives Everywhere. We are doing all we can to support and equip you for the task ahead. But you will face many challenges along the way. Yet those challenges need not stop you. Because our God is bigger than any situation. Even though you may face huge uncertainties, immovable inertia and great opposition – yet God can make a way forward for you. Ask God for wisdom to deal with the challenges appropriately. Faith to trust God for greater things. Unity so that the church may move forward together powerfully. Courage to face the challenges with God!



Discussion Questions

These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. Can we identify specifically what 1 or 2 key challenges we are facing in our ministry or life that is holding us back from rising up?
2. What has inspired us in this message about rising up? Why?
3. What did you learn from the point on “Wisdom to apply the most appropriate approach”?

Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. Choose to focus on 1 of the challenges and consider what specific steps you can take to help overcome it. Consider carefully the most appropriate approach.
2. Is the unity of your team and group a crucial issue to address? What are some specific steps you can identify to build the unity and credibility of the team?



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