

### Standard Operating Procedure

#### Nehemiah 2:17-18

Nehemiah 2:17-18 - *“Then I said to them, “You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.”<sup>18</sup> And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words that he had spoken to me. So they said, “Let us rise up and build.” Then they set their hands to this good work.”*

#### Background Notes

Nehemiah lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, during the time the Persian Empire was in power. He was cupbearer to Artaxerxes I, the Persian king. This was quite a prestigious position. He had to keep track of the king’s food and drink so that no one could poison him, but his work was more than just the job of a butler. It appears he was in a personal advisory position to the king as well. The fact that Artaxerxes made him the governor of Judah shows that Nehemiah already held quite a position of prestige and authority.

As a Jew who was concerned about the needs of his people, Nehemiah used his powerful position to ask King Artaxerxes for permission to travel to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls around the city (v17). Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies had destroyed the walls when they conquered Jerusalem in 586BC.

Here’s an account of the Babylonian invasion and the destruction of Jerusalem, from 2 Chronicles 36:17-20: *“Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons, until the rule of the kingdom of Persia.”*

The pagan Persian king granted Nehemiah’s request to go to Jerusalem and lead the job of repairing the city walls. The king even supplied Nehemiah with the building materials he would need for the repair! So Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem and challenged the people to get on with the job of rebuilding the walls. *“Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.”* And the people responded. They resolved to rebuild the walls. *“So they said, “Let us rise up and build.” Then they set their hands to this good work.”*

## Doctrinal Points

**1. God's S.O.P. (Standard Operating Procedure) is to give the vision to one (or a few), and achieve the job through many.**

God doesn't always work this way, but this is His normal way. God chooses to work through people, and He generally gives the vision to one or a few. Then others are challenged, they catch the vision, they join in, and they all carry on the work together.

And that's what we see here. The teamwork began with a vision given to one person. God gave Nehemiah the vision, he shared it with others, they joined in, and the work is carried on. Again and again, we see this pattern in the Bible. Why? Because that's God's S.O.P - his "Standard Operating Procedure."

Look, for example, at the apostle Paul's ministry. In line with the Great Commission to go into the entire world and preach the gospel, God gave the vision of establishing churches throughout the Roman Empire to the apostle Paul. When others were challenged and motivated, they were brought into the team, and worked with the apostle to carry out the mission. God raised up Paul and gave him the particular initial vision of carrying the Great Commission to the Gentiles, and planting churches all over the Roman Empire.

Aren't you glad that Paul had that "Macedonian vision" in Acts 16, to move out from Asia to Europe? Many of us could say that we heard the gospel because of the apostle Paul's 1st century vision of moving out of Asia with the gospel, and spreading it across to the continent of Europe.

Look at the ministries today that God has greatly used. Most likely, you'll find that the original vision was given to one, or maybe a few, but then others caught the vision. They joined in and supported and carried out the work. It's never a one-man show, but God generally starts with one person - or a few people - to plant the vision.

The Bible College where I teach began with a vision that God gave to three men. They saw a need to start a school where the Bible would be taught systematically. They got started by teaching Bible classes in a church on weeknight evenings. Then others were motivated and caught the vision. The number of students grew, property was purchased - and today the school is well established as a Bible college.

God may be calling you to be a visionary or motivator in a new ministry. What about starting up a Bible study in your school, or in your neighborhood, or where you work, or in your church? God may be giving you the vision. If you get the ball rolling, you'll find that others will catch the vision, and they'll join in and support you. But generally that's the way God works. God's SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) is to give the vision to one (or a few), and then achieve the job through many.

## **2. It's a disgrace for the believer not to have strong walls.**

Verse 17: *"Let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."* The physical wall building in the book of Nehemiah is really a picture of spiritual wall building in the Christian life. God wants us to have strong spiritual walls. The point is, God not only wants us to have strong spiritual walls, but if we don't have strong spiritual walls, the name of the Lord is shamed. It really is a disgrace!

Nehemiah felt it was a disgrace that the people hadn't rebuilt the city walls, and removing the disgrace was one of the reasons that motivated him to come back to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:3). Like the psalmist, he thought, *"Why should the pagan nations be allowed to scoff, 'Where is their God?'" (Psalm 79:10)*. The state of the ruined city walls shamed the Name of the God of Israel before the surrounding pagan provinces. They scoffed, "Look at those Jews. They can't get their act together. And they call themselves the people of God?" So Nehemiah challenged them to get up and build!

God's Word is teaching us that it's a disgrace if Christians don't have strong spiritual walls. There's no good excuse. It shows where our priorities are, and thus it brings shame on the name of the Lord. If you're a weak and feeble Christian who can't defend the faith – it's disgraceful.

How are our walls? Can we defend the faith? Jude 3 tells us to *"contend earnestly for the faith."* Are we living upright lives? Are our lifestyles in line with the Word of God? How are your spiritual walls?

How about leading a person to faith in Jesus Christ? Are you ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about your faith? Do you know the Bible well enough to lead a person to Christ? That's a part of a strong spiritual wall. It's a disgrace for a believer not to have strong spiritual walls.

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Sometimes it takes a new voice to open up our eyes!**

The people of Nehemiah's day had become desensitized to the problem of the broken down walls. They had gotten used to the situation. Past attempts to rebuild the wall had failed, so most of the people decided that they would live with the problem. They had become desensitized and apathetic. They were content to live amidst the ruins of the ruined wall.

Then along came Nehemiah and challenged them! I'm sure some of the people wondered, "Who is this new guy?" But most of the people responded to the challenge. Their eyes were opened. They responded to the new voice. They finally realized the problem.

Sometimes it takes a new voice to open up our eyes. Maybe it's a challenging sermon. Maybe it's an article in a Christian journal. Suddenly the blinders fall off, and we realize that we've become desensitized to sin in our lives. Or maybe we become aware that we lack the proper concern for needs in our family. Or maybe we realize that we've been reluctant to get involved in service in our church, or in a Christian ministry. We're just going along our way, content to live with mediocrity - and suddenly God brings along a new voice to challenge us. Sometimes it takes a new voice to open up our eyes!

## **2. Your own Christian testimony can challenge and motivate others.**

Notice that Nehemiah's own personal testimony became an essential part of motivating the people: *"And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, 'Let us rise up and build' (v18).*

Notice what Nehemiah did not say. He didn't start by flaunting his power as a representative of the Persian king. He didn't flex his political muscle and say he had the authority to command them. As governor appointed by the Persian king, Nehemiah could have said that. He didn't call them a bunch of lazy sinners, or say that the walls should have been built years ago! What did he do?

He linked himself with the people by using the word **"we"**: *"that we may no longer be a reproach."* Then he simply gave his testimony: *"I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me."*

We may think that we can never challenge or motivate people like Nehemiah did – but don't limit God! What about using your own testimony? You'd be amazed at how God can motivate others through your own testimony.

Don't despise your testimony. Some of you were raised in a Christian home, and you think you don't have an "exciting" testimony of delivery from a life of lurid sin - but don't despise your background or your testimony! Tell people how God has worked in your life. *"I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me..."*

God can greatly use your Christian testimony to challenge and motivate others.