

Knowing Your People

Nehemiah 3:17-32

Nehemiah 3:17-32 - *“After him the Levites, under Rehum the son of Bani, made repairs. Next to him Hashabiah, leader of half the district of Keilah, made repairs for his district. ¹⁸ After him their brethren, under Bavai the son of Henadad, leader of the other half of the district of Keilah, made repairs. ¹⁹ And next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, the leader of Mizpah, repaired another section in front of the Ascent to the Armory at the buttress. ²⁰ After him Baruch the son of Zabbai carefully repaired the other section, from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. ²¹ After him Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, repaired another section, from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib.*

²² And after him the priests, the men of the plain, made repairs. ²³ After him Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs by his house. ²⁴ After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress, even as far as the corner. ²⁵ Palal the son of Uzai made repairs opposite the buttress, and on the tower which projects from the king's upper house that was by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh made repairs.

²⁶ Moreover the Nethinim who dwelt in Ophel made repairs as far as the place in front of the Water Gate toward the east, and on the projecting tower. ²⁷ After them the Tekoites repaired another section, next to the great projecting tower, and as far as the wall of Ophel.

²⁸ Beyond the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. ²⁹ After them Zadok the son of Immer made repairs in front of his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. ³⁰ After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah made repairs in front of his dwelling. ³¹ After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the Nethinim and of the merchants, in front of the Miphkad Gate, and as far as the upper room at the corner. ³² And between the upper room at the corner, as far as the Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.”

Background Notes

The walls of Jerusalem were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies when the city was conquered and destroyed in 586BC. It's now 445BC, about 100 years later, and the city wall was being rebuilt under the direction of Nehemiah, a godly Jewish man. Nehemiah was an employee of the Persian king, Artaxerxes I, but the king granted him permission to travel from Persia to Jerusalem to direct the rebuilding project.

As a great leader, Nehemiah was able to communicate the vision of rebuilding the wall. He was able to motivate the people. He set up a plan for coordinating the work, and he was able to get the people to cooperate together in this important building project.

Chapter 3 is a record of all the people who worked on the wall, exactly what section they worked on, and how the work was accomplished. About forty different sections are mentioned, including ten gates, as well as a record of who worked at each location.

Doctrinal Points

1. God keeps a record of everything believers do for Him.

When you first read this chapter you might think it's boring, but there's actually a wealth of material here. The fact that God's Word includes all these details, names, what they did, their attitudes, etc., teaches us that God keeps a record of everything we do for Him. Their personal names are mentioned, and exactly what everyone did, and how much they did. God knows you personally, and you can be sure that God keeps a record of everything you do for Him.

God even takes note when you do more than your "fair share"! Verse 4 describes Meremoth's initial repair work, and then verse 21 says that he repaired another section. God took note of that! In verse 5 we read about the Tekoites and the section of the wall they repaired, and verse 27 says, *"After them the Tekoites repaired another section, next to the great projecting tower."* God keeps track when you do more than your fair share!

1 Timothy 5:17 says, *"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."* God knows when people are putting in extra effort, working hard, and putting in more than their fair share.

God also takes note of our attitudes. Look at verse 21: *"Baruch the son of Zabbai carefully [or diligently] repaired the other section."* Romans 12:11 tells us to *"keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."*

And another point: God doesn't just take note of the "up front" people. Look at the people from Gibeon who repaired the wall (v7). What do we know about the Gibeonites? They were not Jews. They were Canaanites, and they had deceived Israel into making a bad covenant back in Joshua's day. But, in His grace, God brought them into the covenant community - and now we see that God took note of their service. He didn't just notice Jewish workers!

What an encouragement for us! God keeps a record of everything we do for Him, even if we're not well-known or up front people! Other people may not notice your service, or appreciate it, or think much of it, but God notices! 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, *"be steadfast... always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

1 Corinthians 3:8 teaches us that *“he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”* When we’re at Home with the Lord, *“each one will receive praise from God”* (1 Corinthians 4:5). So God keeps a record of everything we do for Him - but He can’t keep a record if we’re not doing anything! No service means no reward. God keeps a record of everything we do for Him.

2. Good spiritual leaders motivate people.

The book of Nehemiah teaches leadership principles. There are many general principles throughout the book. Here are a few examples from this chapter:

- Nehemiah led by example. He didn’t direct from an administrative office somewhere far from the wall. Although it wouldn’t have been wrong for him to direct the repair work from an office, Nehemiah recognized that his personal presence at the wall was extremely important for keeping the workers motivated.
- Nehemiah didn’t force the people to do a job they didn’t want to do. He led by getting them excited – so they wanted to build the wall! He made them feel ashamed of willingly living in a city that had a ruined wall. He got them motivated so they wanted to rebuild the wall.
- Nehemiah never bragged or took credit for himself. He left that to God.
- Nehemiah involved the workers where they were most easily motivated. This is probably the primary principle of spiritual leadership in this chapter.

For example, where did Nehemiah put the priests? He had them build at the Sheep Gate - right near the Temple!

Did you notice a phrase that was repeated again and again in this section? *“Beside his house”* or *“opposite his house.”* Why did Nehemiah assign people there? It’s obvious. Wouldn’t you be much more motivated to work on the wall near your home - where your family lives, and where they’re most vulnerable? Wouldn’t you know the situation best near your home? That’s where you would be most efficient. You would realize the great importance of rebuilding the wall, and that’s where you’ll do your best work.

In the same way, spiritual leaders today should try to get people involved where they’re most motivated. Would you put somebody who has no interest or skill in music in charge of your music ministry? Of course not! Where would you get the most interest and support in leading your youth group? Parents! They have a vested interest. They want an excellent youth program for their teens.

Good spiritual leaders will motivate people to serve the Lord, and here we see a key way to get them motivated. Get people involved where they’re interested and motivated!

Practical Applications

1. If you want to be a good spiritual leader, get to know people.

Like Nehemiah, good leaders get to know people's names, interests, their strengths, and their weaknesses. How do we know Nehemiah knew all this? We know it because he wrote the book! In chapter 3 God is teaching us that He keeps a record, and the fact that Nehemiah wrote it means he knew these people, too. And he was keeping a record.

Do you have a hard time remembering people's names? You'll have to work on that if you're going to be a good spiritual leader. Nehemiah knew all the people by name, and he knew all about them. That takes work. I have about 100 students in my Old Testament class, and I really work on getting to know my students by name as early as possible in the academic year. It's work, but it's worth it. It's part of leadership.

Like Nehemiah, good spiritual leaders know people personally. They get to know them by name, know what they can do, and know who can responsibly carry a greater load.

2. Start serving the Lord in an area where you're interested - and in your own back yard!

People often say to me, "I want to serve the Lord but I don't know what to do. I don't know where to start. I don't know what my gifts are." I tell them to **start where they have an interest!** Do you like to bake cookies? Take some to your Bible study. Like to work on cars? Help someone in financial need. Love little children? Volunteer for your church nursery, or help a struggling single mom, or teach Sunday school.

And **start in your own back yard.** Before you decide to run off to do foreign missions, make sure the spiritual wall in your own life is built. Make sure your home and family have strong spiritual walls. Serve in your church. Witness to your neighbors.

When I was a graduate student at a secular university, I was concerned about finding an area to serve the Lord there, and I wondered what I should do. In a number of ways, the Lord told me to **start where I was.** So I started a Bible study right there in the graduate department. Only one person came the first week, but gradually the group grew, and several people trusted in the Lord.

So - start serving the Lord in an area where you're interested - and start in your own back yard!