

## Organizing Like Nehemiah - 3:1-32

We've been learning a lot from Nehemiah, but today's scripture lesson seems to be just a list of names and work assignments. Many Bible commentators and preachers just skip over this. But this section is important to understanding Nehemiah's plan. Last week we talked about how you motivate people. But **motivation without organization leads to frustration**. This morning I want to talk about a few axioms of successful organizing. Let's start right in:

First, **1. Keep Organization Simple** - Keep it as simple as possible. For such an enormous project as rebuilding a whole city, Nehemiah had a simple plan to organize it. He didn't create a whole new organizational system or any complex charts. His plan was very simple. He organized around natural groupings of people and leaders. The priests in verse 1, the men of Jericho in verse 2, sons of Hassenah in verse 3, the men of Tekoa in verse 5. These are natural connections that are already there. The point is don't create organization if you don't absolutely need it.

What was the most natural grouping of organization for Nehemiah's particular situation? The families! In verse 4:13 Nehemiah tells us *"I stationed the people... by families..."* It was the simplest way of organizing the job. The thing is, **the strongest organizations are the simplest ones**. It's like toys. Blocks are almost unbreakable. The more complex toys are the easier they break – sometimes in minutes! The more complex something is the more can go wrong. The simpler it is, the stronger it is. So the simplest organizations tend to be the strongest ones.

**2. Work with the Willing** - Work with those who want to work. A lot of leaders never learn this. They spend all their time trying to corral the lazy, the self satisfied, the oppositional, and the apathetic instead of working with those who are ready to do something and want to work.

In Nehemiah's case, all available help was put to work. the spiritual leaders led the way. Men and women, city and country people, white collar, blue collar. There were perfume makers, goldsmiths, government leaders, business leaders -- everyone got involved. Everyone was moving bricks and making mortar... everyone, that is, except for one little group.

In verse 3:5 Nehemiah records, *"The men of Tekoa built the next section, but the leading men of the town refused to do the manual labor assigned them by the supervisors."* These guys think they're too good. They thought the work was beneath them or was too much trouble or that someone else should do it. It doesn't say what excuse they gave, but in every church, in every community, in every business you have these kinds of people: Folk who don't want to do work because they think they're above it or that someone else should do it or that it's not their responsibility.

Nehemiah's response to these shirkers seems to have been to ignore them. He didn't focus on those who weren't willing to work. He focused on those who were willing to work. He didn't lose sleep, get bitter, waste time trying to corral them. If you're a leader, you've got to give up worrying about people who don't want to get involved. You just worry about those people who do want to get involved.

Work with people who want to work. When I first started out as a pastor I didn't know this lesson. Every time we planned a project, a work party, an event, I focused more on my disappointment about all the people who weren't there rather than enjoying the people who showed up. God finally showed me, get excited about those who come, those who show up and want to do something meaningful – stop obsessing about those other people, it's their loss.

That's a basic principle of organizing: **love everybody, but move with the movers**. In every organization, family, church there are some people who want to go ahead, who want to be involved. Focus on those folk. Don't focus on the people who make excuses.

**3. Do Three Things: Delegate, Delegate, and Delegate** - Make assignments, divide up the project by tasks, assign people to those tasks. What if, after Nehemiah's pep rally when he got everybody excited and they jumped up ready to go build, what if he said, "Just go start working wherever you want to work on." That wouldn't have worked. What if he said, "Let's all go to one part of the wall and work on the same part - right now; all at once." There would have been confusion, chaos, everyone bumping into each other.

Nehemiah had them work by sections. He walked around the entire wall with its gates and divides it all up counterclockwise. It obvious that he's thought this out. He may have divided up the wall into sections when he was doing that midnight inspection. In organization, keep it simple, work with those who want to work and then make assignments.

When you're delegating, develop clear objectives and then break down major goals into smaller tasks. Some people call this the salami technique - slice it up into sections you can deal with. This helps to cut huge tasks and

problems down to a manageable size. Nehemiah attacks this huge undertaking of building the wall by breaking it down into bite size pieces.

Then, as much as possible, match the right people to the right tasks. In delegating take into account what the task is all about and what the person is good at and get them together. Some tasks are ones that we all have to be willing to handle - there are just some things that simply need to get done, whether we like them or not. Try to share those among everyone. But it's important that you know who's going to tackle what because, **something that's everyone's responsibility is no one's responsibility**. Someone has got to assume responsibility.

**4. Give People Ownership** - In organizing any project allow for ownership. Help people feel it's their project. Verse 10 says "*Jedaiah... ..repaired the wall across from his own house.*" Verse 23 says, "*Benjamin and Hasshub repaired the section across from their house, and Azariah... ..repaired the section across from his house.*" Verses 28 and 29 says, "*Above the Horse Gate, the priests repaired the wall. Each one repaired the section immediately across from his own house. Next Zadok... ..also rebuilt the wall across from his own house.*"

If you were helping to build the wall, where would you most likely want to be working? What part of the wall would you be most motivated to make strong? The part by your own house, of course. When you have ownership you have higher motivation. If I'm building the part of the wall that's going to protect my house, I'll do a good job.

In verse 1 it says that the high priest and his fellow workers rebuilt the Sheep Gate. Well, guess what? That gate was the one that was closest to the temple and it was called the Sheep Gate because it was the one they brought the sheep in for the temple sacrifice.

Nehemiah allowed people to work in their areas of interest and concern. **Good organizations allow workers to develop their own areas**. The work has to be in cooperation with the greater efforts of the entire organization - we're not talking about people carving out their own little kingdoms. That's true here in our church. If you've got the idea, if you've got the gifts needed, if you've got the interest, then you're it! We try to allow the people of our church to have ownership of ministries. Rather than tie them up with committees and boards to even get started. If you want to start something and you're a member, you're it! We allow for ownership.

**5. Make Teamwork Central** - Whenever you've got a project of any size realize that we accomplish so much more together than we do as individuals. The main point of Nehemiah, chapter three is that they worked together. The key phrase is "next to him" or "next to them". This is used over and over again. They cooperated with each other. They helped and encouraged each other.

Next week we're going to see that the whole time they were building the wall they were under attack. They really needed help, support, and encouragement. B.C. Forbes, the guy who founded *Forbes* magazine said, "You spell success, T-E-A-M-W-O-R-K." Cooperation is a key principle that's built into good organizations.

Together we can do things we can't do as individuals. Geese can fly 72% farther when they're in formation than when they fly by themselves. God designed the world that way. When we cooperate and there is teamwork there is growth. Cooperation is a greater motivator than competition.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12 says, "*Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.*"

Good organizations provide a supportive climate for teamwork. In the New Testament, when referring to believers and the church, the phrase "one another" is used over and over. There's no such thing as a Lone Ranger Christian. We are together in this. We're a team. There's tremendous power in cooperation. God can overlook almost anything in a church: poor facilities, no facilities, no talent. The one thing God will not overlook is disunity. In the first ten chapters of Acts, ten times it says, "they were of one accord... of one heart... unified." When you have unity like they did in Acts you will have the power of the early church. There's tremendous power in teamwork - that's a major part of what the Wesleyan movement and our denomination is based on. Individually, each of us can't do much, but together we're powerful. Snow is a great demonstration of what God can do with a bunch of flakes. Snowflakes are pretty frail. But if enough of them stick together they can shut down a whole region.

Does all this need to be supervised - of course it does! That's shown and implied throughout Nehemiah 3. You have to supervise the work in any kind of a project. In Nehemiah 3, Nehemiah's name is never mentioned. Not once in the chapter. There's nothing there about him. Where was he? He was out on the line doing something

they trained in when I went through four months of management training Wal-Mart used to do before assigning managers. It's what Tom Peters calls in his book Passion for Excellence: MBWA -- Management By Walking Around. He was walking around checking up, finding out what's going on, and counting on those delegated to each section to supervise their part.

There were appointed supervisors who were helping control the work, manage it, administer it and make sure it was going forward.

**6. Give Credit Where Due** - That's one of the purposes of this chapter. Nehemiah credits those who are actually doing the work. Two thousand years later on the opposite side of the world, we can still read and mispronounce their names. Because of this record we still remember them. If they hadn't done their part and then if Nehemiah hadn't noted what they'd done, we wouldn't have any idea who they were.

Verse 20 has the name of one man that gets a particularly honorable mention. It says everybody did a good job but about this guy in particular, it says, "*Next to him was Baruch son of Zabbai, who zealously repaired an additional section from the angle to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest.*" Notice it's an additional section - above and beyond his regular task - and that he did it "zealously". That's the only descriptive term in the entire chapter. A few people didn't do any work. Others did their work. But one guy did his work enthusiastically and three thousand years later we know the name of that guy. We don't know exactly what he did... maybe he worked extra fast or worked extra hours or had an especially positive attitude. The point is if you want to be recognized in your work, do what everyone else does but do it more and do it with enthusiasm. God certainly notices enthusiasm; whether I'm serving enthusiastically or not. Do you know what the word enthusiasm literally means? It's from a Greek word literally meaning "God possessed". When you're possessed by God you're enthusiastic.

In 1 Corinthians 16:18 Paul says, "They have been a wonderful encouragement to me, as they have been to you. You must show your appreciation to all who serve so well."

So here's what we're going to do. We want to encourage those who do great work on a project and particularly those who do enthusiastic work. So starting later this year we're going to start awarding two awards. We'll try to do this every year, but we'll only do it when someone really goes above and beyond. The one award will be the Nehemiah Award. That will be for leadership of a ministry project that goes above and beyond. The second will be the Baruch Ben Zabbai Award - named for the enthusiastic worker that Nehemiah took time to point out in particular. More than one person can get an award if that's appropriate, either for work on the same ministry or on separate ones.

Another interesting thing in this chapter: Verse 12 says, "*Shallum son of Hallohesh and his daughters repaired the next section. He was the leader of the other half of the district of Jerusalem.*" In those days, women did certain things and men did certain things. Women didn't do bricks and mortar. But even if women did contribute to a project at that time, they were never recognized for it. But Nehemiah recognized them.

Let's go back and **look at verse 5** " *The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, [Tekoa, by the way, was a hick town. Nothing much there.] but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.*" Everybody else is honored for what they did, but thousands of years later these guys are remembered for what they didn't do. What an epitaph! When these guys started making their excuses why they couldn't move brick and mortar do you think they had any idea how many people were going to know about it? Billions of people over thousands of years have known that these guys wimped out and didn't do their part.

A lot of churches run on the 80-20 principle: 20% of the people do 80% of the work. Unfortunately that's true in most churches. It should never be that way. But what you have to do then is focus on those who are doing their part. God knows what each of us is able to do. One day God is going to reward those who did what they were able to do. Nehemiah had a list, but the most important thing is where are you on God's list? One day when you get to heaven God's going review how you were involved in his work. **Romans 14:12 says**, "*Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.*" The Bible says one day I'm going to give an account of my life to God for how I served Him. You are too. It really doesn't matter what anybody else thinks, what people know or don't know about what you do. What matters is God knows. What will God say about me and my service for him? Will he say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Or "Why didn't you do more?" What is God going to say about you? If you were to die tonight what would God say about your service?

1 Corinthians 15:58 says, *"Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless."* God may not have asked any of us to go build a wall in Jerusalem, but God has asked every one of us to be involved in building up this church and the church all over the world. If you're part of this church, that includes the ministry of this church. To be a Christian means to be called into the ministry. That doesn't mean everybody is a pastor. But every Christian is called to serve. A non-serving Christian is a contradiction. God expects us to be involved in service. Romans 12:4-5 tells us, *"Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other."* What is my function in the body of Christ? Ask yourself that. Where is your place here at Evangelical Church? What part of the wall are you building? We all have different gifts that God has given us. Sometimes people use spiritual gifts as a cop out. "That's not my gift." So they won't do this or that. You ought to work in your area of interest. You ought to work where your spiritual gifts indicate - that's a fact. That ought to be your primary area of service. But God also calls you to work beyond your area of spiritual giftedness. If you were to go back and read this list of men and women who built the wall, there's not one professional builder listed. None of these people were particularly "gifted" to do it.

There were three kinds of workers mentioned in Nehemiah 3. There were those who did no work, there were those who did their work, and there was at least one guy who did enthusiastic work. God notices all three kinds.

Which of the three describes your involvement in God's work? Where is your place on the wall? Maybe you don't feel like anybody notices or cares. I care. More than that, God cares. I may not even know the things you have to give up in order to do your ministry in this church, but God notices. He's in heaven noting every single thing. Scripture says that you don't give a cup of cold water in Jesus' name without it being noticed and that you'll be rewarded appropriately and generously for it.