

**Let Us Arise and Build
Side by Side—Working together
(Nehemiah 3)**

Intro: Every once in a while you come across one of those chapters in the Bible that looks like a linguistic obstacle course!—verse after verse of unpronounceable names and places. Sometimes we are tempted to skip over them and move on to the next one. After all there couldn't be much useful to be gained from a chapter like that. Right? Wrong! If we did that with Nehemiah chapter three we would miss some powerful and valuable lessons on building for God!

Last week we talked about the importance of great leadership and we considered Nehemiah as an example of a great leader who motivated the people to say, "Let us arise and build" (Neh. 2:18). Consequently he describes their efforts in a single sentence: "So they put their hands to the good work". Here in Nehemiah 3 we see an insightful explanation of those 9 powerful words. So let's take a closer look at this chapter in a lesson I've called "Side by side—working together."

Ordinarily I've been reading the text; but because of the length of the chapter, I'll simply summarize the action of this chapter. Nehemiah is giving a detailed account of the rebuilding and repair of the walls and gates around the city. Most of gates have names that relate to the activity taking place around them. For example, the sheep gate (near the temple) would be the place through which the priest brought sheep from the fields into the temple precincts for the daily offerings. The fish gate probably marks a place where a market for fish was found, etc. Nehemiah, with great detail, takes us around the city in circular fashion showing how the cooperative effort of the people resulted in a successful restoration of the walls. And it teaches us a valuable lesson about teamwork!

If, on the one hand, we see that great works for God depend upon great leadership, we can see, on the other hand, that great works for God depend upon great follow-ship! No leader, however great, can accomplish what all God's people can do when they work together! In fact, without follow-ship, leadership doesn't exist! So let's spend some time thinking about the features of great followers!

Great followers have a willingness to do great things for God!

Earlier in the series I mentioned that there are at least five ingredients necessary for any successful work!

- A Noble Purpose
- A Clear Plan
- A Willing People
- A Burning Passion
- A Tenacious Persistence

Nehemiah led a willing people: “So they put their hands to the good work” (2:20)

The local church is not an organization for “superstars”. It is a team that depends upon the willingness of all its members to see the good things leaders set before them and work to accomplish them. No elder, deacon, preacher, or Bible class teacher has the power to build a church by his own efforts.

“He who professes to lead but has no one following is only out for a walk.”

Great followers recognize that and demonstrate a willingness to work for God!

Great followers work side by side with other followers!

Nehemiah chapter three gives us a vivid picture of the details of the work.

In total there were ten different gates mentioned in the repairing of the wall. Some forty sections of the wall are mentioned, showing Nehemiah’s careful detailed planning of the project. Archaeologists have found that some parts of the rebuilt wall were as thick as eight feet. Since breaking down a gate was easier than destroying a piece of the wall, areas around the gates needed special repair and reinforcement.

Notice the frequent use of the expression, “Next to”! The idea here is that the people worked together—not just in the same place, but in cooperation. Men and women, artisans and laborers, princes and commoners, all labored side by side. Each one was focused on the task given to them!

It shows us how works of great magnitude are accomplished in “pieces.” No one did it all; but everyone working side by side built his “piece” of the project.

The success of God’s work today also depends upon this “side by side” mentality.

Once we have big picture view of what we want to do, then everyone has put in their “piece” of the wall!

Every Christian has to connect with the vision of Ephesians 4: “from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:16, NASB)

Great followers learn to do what they may not be used to doing!

In chapter three there is one blight on a perfect record of cooperation and unity. The nobles of Tekoa shirked their responsibility (v. 5)

“Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters.” (Nehemiah 3:5, NASB)

Were they so used to telling others what to do, that they thought it beneath them to work like everyone else?

Did they think that it was beneath them to dig in the rubble?

Did they think they were above getting their hands dirty?

Nehemiah wrote to their shame that they would not do their part!

What is especially encouraging is how people who had limited strength and experience in wall building responded to the challenge.

Notice how people with little talent in the area of brick masonry got involved.

Priests (v. 1-2)

THEN Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel.” (Nehemiah 3:1, NASB)

Apothecaries & goldsmiths (3:8)

“Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah of the goldsmiths made repairs. And next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.” (Nehemiah 3:8, NASB)

One man didn't have sons to carry out the hard labor of moving the debris. So his daughters participated in the rebuilding of the walls! (3:12)

“And next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters.” (Nehemiah 3:12, NASB)

Those without masonry skill didn't opt out because of a lack of “talent”.

It is amazing how quickly we dismiss improvement or growth by the protest of a lack of talent! We assume because we haven't done something in the past, we can't do it in the future! Even if we account for the fact that some people may be more “talented” than others, there is some things we can all learn to do if we want to.

When will we see that all spiritual accomplishment is like my trumpet teacher once told me about success in the music business: 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration!

Great followers build with enthusiasm!

Notice the remark about Baruch!

“After him Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the Angle to the doorway of the house of Eliashib the high priest.” (Nehemiah 3:20, NASB)

Note (Heb. *harah*) (3:20) The Hebrew verb translated *zealously* here (Heb. *harah*) usually means “to burn with anger” (Gen. 39:19; Jon. 4:1) and depicts anger as a burning fire. In the present passage however, the word denotes burning with zeal, not anger. Baruch was not angry; he was enthused!

In other words, Baruch earnestly wanted to repair the walls of Jerusalem because he knew it was God's city and God's work. His repairs were for the glory of the living Lord.

We see enthusiasm in that some of the builders having finished their job went to work somewhere else!

“After him Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz repaired another section, from the doorway of Eliashib's house even as far as the end of his house.” (Nehemiah 3:21, NASB)

In other words, this man had already repaired the section of the wall assigned to him; but he moved to another location and started to work again.

There was no “I've done my part and I'm not doing any more!”

Instead great followers are tireless workers who don't compare what they do with others. If they have greater skill or efficiency, they just use it to do more for God! Jesus' complaint about the church at Laodicea was not that they had no talent nor that they didn't know the truth. They just didn't have any passion! “I just wish were you cold or hot!” Enthusiasm is contagious! Great followers ignite others with their infectious enthusiasm.

Great followers deserve credit for the work they do!

In the first three chapters the emphasis is upon the leader; but in this chapter the emphasis is on the followers. Nehemiah is not mentioned one time in the whole chapter, but the people who answered his call are named. The people built the wall, and they worked as hard as they said they would (2:18).

Nehemiah showed himself to be a great leader by acknowledging and approving the work of ordinary people! The Holy Spirit made sure that we knew the names of these people we otherwise would have never known had it not been for their willingness to help do God's work!

Let this be an encouragement to you! God knows who you are and He knows every contribution you make. He will reward you for every thing you do for Him! We have some great followers here, people just like the kind we read about in Nehemiah. We can't give too much credit to the people on whose shoulders the work of God is carried.

Conclusion: Some people are constructionists, helping to get the job done. Others are destructionists, busy tearing things down. A third group is made up of obstructionists who create problems for the people doing the work. In which group are you?

Can we count on you to exercise your influence and leadership where you can? And can we count on you to be a team player in following the leadership of others? If we can, then the best days of Perry Heights are yet to come!