

Worthy of Our All

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NEXT: From Northwest Houston to the World | March 1, 2026 | Nehemiah 5:14-19; Nehemiah 6:15-16; Nehemiah 7:1-73

Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Amen. I want to encourage you to grab your Bibles and turn to Nehemiah chapter 5. As you're turning to Nehemiah chapter 5, for those who are on the far-left sides of the aisles, if you would do me a favor and pass out those cards that are right there on the floor by you.

We've done this every single week. This is for Champion Forest members only. The card looks a little like this right here, and it's our NEXT commitment card. Many of you have already come prepared and filled out your card. We've got envelopes if you need them. The cards are in the envelopes as they're being passed, and we want every family to have one of these cards. We'll refer to it a little bit later.

After our message today, we're going to have an opportunity to lay our commitments before the Lord. So, if you are a member engaged in the life and ministry of Champion Forest, we want every single person here to have one of these envelopes. The card is in there, and again, many of you came prepared.

A History of Faith and Sacrifice

I've told you before that I have in my office a file box filled with articles from the history of our church. There are service programs and newsletters. There are old-school - remember the Olan Mills picture directories? Many of you in here have been around for a while, and you've probably gotten a text from me in the last month as I've scoured those directories, taking pictures of you from 20 and 30 years ago and saying, "Who is this?!"

I've loved going through these. That box is here, right? You see it. It says, "Church History." It's filled, and it's got all sorts of folders in here, starting with 1968 and 1969, when this church was just in the heart of our first pastor. It goes all the way through the present day. I've got blueprints in here and all sorts of things. I love going through it.

This is why I said when we started our NEXT project that we called it NEXT on purpose. What we're doing here in this generosity initiative, this building campaign, if you will, isn't new to Champion Forest. It's simply what's next for Champion Forest.

I'll illustrate it this way. This is from one of the first building campaigns of this church. It's from 1976. You open it up, and it's got a great note from our first pastor, Robin Guess. The title of this program was "Together We Build."

The church at that time, in 1976, was trying to raise \$400,000 because it needed to add 12 pews to the original chapel. That would increase seating capacity by 21%. They were growing at such a rate that they

needed to add 12 pews.

They also wanted to expand their life group and Sunday school space, so they had Sunday school rooms and nursery rooms as part of that. I've loved looking through these. On the steering committee for that building program - I told him earlier I was going to call him out - Mr. Frank Dartez was on this committee right here. He's suited up and looks so good. This was 1976: "Together We Build."

This one is "Building Together by Faith," from 1981. They had already outgrown their 12 pews there at Greenwood Forest, and they needed to build a new worship center. That's what this building campaign was all about.

You've got a letter from the pastor, a story of their history and growth, and, by faith, the need is great. There's a great shot of what they were trying to do. It's much like our NEXT brochure that we passed out.

Again, there are just some incredible names. If you've been around Champion Forest for any amount of time, you know these names. I'm reading them to give honor to whom honor is due. Bob Jester was the campaign director. He's sitting right over here. Gene Birdwell was a part of this building process. Gary Ealer and Lee Harn were both a part of this. Craig Reynolds, the Astros great, was a part of this. I'm having lunch with him in a couple of weeks.

That was 1981: "Building Together by Faith." Do you see the theme? "Together We Build." "Building Together by Faith." It's always been in the heart of this church to expand and to reach, and it's beautiful.

This one is from November 7, 1993. It's another campaign, just like the one we're in. The title of this campaign is "A Church on the Move." This campaign was to relocate, buy the acreage, and build the first phase of the location we're currently sitting in.

They worshiped down in our Family Life Center. That was the first phase, and they had plans - you can read all about it in here - to eventually build the worship center we're sitting in. Again, there are just great names: Charlotte Jester, Ken Barrett. I could go on and on. Jerry Atkins, Bill Upchurch. Again, many of you know these names. The great Jimmy LeBoeuf. There is such an incredible history here at Champion Forest: "A Church on the Move."

I'll do one more. This is from 2008. We've gone from 1976 to 1981 to 1993, and this was 2008. This was called "Impact: For Him, For Every Generation." This was under the leadership of Pastor David Fleming.

Again, it's just a great little deal. They were trying to raise \$40 million in 2008. There was a recession, and Champion Forest, you came through. You raised it all. You built the Commons that connected these buildings together. You built the children's building that our children are currently occupying. You built the new student ministry building that our students are currently in. All of that happened in 2008.

And this was state-of-the-art right here. I mean, even in the back, look at this. You've got a CD-ROM. You could take it home and plug it in. Students, this was so cool back in the day, all right? These CDs. I'll explain it to you later.

Again, it was a three-year campaign, just like the one we're in, over and above our regular tithes and offerings. It was the Impact campaign.

In every single one of these campaigns, Champion Forest, you have stepped up. You have committed to do what you have sensed, what we have sensed, God is leading us as a church to do.

I've got to tell you, for me, leading up to this weekend, it has just been a week of gratitude at the sheer faith of this congregation, the joy of this congregation, and the spirit of this congregation.

I have taken phone calls. I've received texts. I've received emails. I've been in stores where members of Champion Forest were present, and all have been so encouraging about today. "Are you excited about today? Are you scared about today? How are you feeling? We're so excited!"

It's all been so encouraging. It's been so uplifting.

And now we come to today, what we've been praying for, planning for, and anticipating. As a church, we've been in this since October. Publicly, it's just been for the last month or so, but as a team, we've been working on this for over a year. Today is Commitment Sunday.

Worthy of Our All

I want to bring a message from the book of Nehemiah that I'm calling "Worthy of Our All." We've been making our way through this book, and I want us to look at several verses from three different chapters in our time together today.

As I always say, if you've missed any of these messages, I really want to encourage you to go online and listen to them. It'll help you with context. These messages build on top of one another as we make our way through the book of Nehemiah.

You can get the messages online. You can download our app. All of my notes that I preach from are there, so you can print them out and study from them. Again, if you're on your way to the gym or on your way to work, or if you're having trouble sleeping, turn me on, all right? I will put you right to sleep. Listen to these messages.

Nehemiah, as we have mentioned, has returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. For 100 years, the city of Jerusalem had lain in desolation. The walls were broken down. The gates of the city were burned.

Nehemiah wanted to go back. God had put it in his heart to go back and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. He received the blessing of the Persian king, and with that blessing, he went back.

When he returned to Jerusalem, he found a defeated people. The temple had been rebuilt, but it was just a shell of its former glory, and the walls were completely crumbling.

What really upset Nehemiah, perhaps more than anything else, was that he looked at the walls being down and at the shell of the temple, and it broke his heart because, to him, this was a stain on the reputation of God. It was a reproach to God.

So he rallied the people. He called them to this incredible work to rebuild the city and build up the walls.

We saw last week that he fought through opposition. Sometimes he confronted it head-on. At other times, he ignored it. We saw him deal with inward conflict. But one thing was certain: No matter what was coming his way, he was going to lead the people of Israel to complete the task that God had called them to. The project of rebuilding the wall was not going to stop.

The major point we're going to look at today out of this passage of Scripture fits perfectly with where we are on this Commitment Sunday. There's one major point to the sermon.

I've told you before, in seminary class, one of the students asked our preaching professor, "How many points should a sermon have?"

The professor said, "It should at least have one, all right? At least let it have one point."

Well, here is the point of the sermon today. I'll put it on the screen for you:

What makes sacrifice significant is the motive behind it.

Sacrifice is the theme of the message today. God really is worthy of our all.

Nehemiah's Personal Sacrifice

Nehemiah chapter 5, starting in verse 14, says this:

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor.

The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people.

But I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us.

Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance.

Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people.

Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

— Nehemiah 5:14-19

That last sentence is just a one-sentence prayer. It's one of the nine prayers in the book of Nehemiah.

Here we see the personal sacrifice of Nehemiah. As governor, he had a right to tax the people. It was in his purview. It was under his authority. Like his predecessors, he could have taxed them 40 shekels of silver. That was part of the daily ration assigned to the governor.

But Nehemiah says he didn't do it. He refused to lay heavy burdens on the people. He refused to take advantage of the people. He refused to fill his pockets at the expense of the people.

Instead, he worked alongside them. We saw that last week. Nehemiah was always leading by example.

And look at verses 17 and 18. Out of his own pocket, at his own expense, he fed 150 people a day at his table for 12 years. That's not cheap. One hundred and fifty people a day for 12 years. It was a sacrifice.

That's over 4,000 oxen. That's over 26,000 sheep that were his, that he had butchered and served so that 150 people at his table could eat.

Nehemiah didn't exploit or take advantage of the people. Instead, he sacrificed, and he served them.

As a result, the work of God, which Nehemiah put above everything else - "God, this work You have called me to" - he put it even before personal expense. Because of his sacrifice, the work of God continued to move forward.

Despite the outward opposition and despite the inward conflict that we looked at last week, the work of God in rebuilding the wall, led by Nehemiah and the people of Israel together - get this - had been left undone for over 100 years. Because of their sacrifice, it was completed in 52 days.

It's a miracle.

Look at Nehemiah 6, verse 15:

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.

And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

— Nehemiah 6:15-16

This is in the August-to-October time frame. It took 52 days.

When all their enemies heard about it, and when all the nations around them saw it, they were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem. That's a way of saying their pride was crushed. It's a way of saying they realized that they weren't all that.

Maybe Israel's God was alive. Maybe Israel's God was for them, because the enemies of God perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of their God.

I love that.

At the end of the building campaign, at the end of the project, there wasn't much talk about how great Nehemiah was. There wasn't much talk about how great the people of Israel were.

What was everybody saying?

"This could only happen with the help of our God."

I'm praying that will be the case for us, Champion Forest. At the end of this NEXT project, it's not going to be about us. It's not about our glory. It's not about me. It's not about you. It's about what God is doing through us. It's all for His glory.

That's exactly what kept Nehemiah going. What a feat. What an accomplishment. Fifty-two days. Something that hadn't been done in over 100 years.

I remind you that he completed the project in 52 days. That's less than two months. But I also remind you that he prayed for four months before he ever asked permission to come back to Jerusalem and start rebuilding the walls.

For four months he prayed. Then, in less than two months, something that hadn't been accomplished in 100 years was accomplished.

What's the point? God can do more in a moment of us seeking Him than we can in a lifetime of striving in our own efforts.

Let's make sure that whatever we attempt to do as individuals, as a family, or as a church, whatever we believe God is calling us to, is saturated in prayer so that we can have His help in accomplishing whatever it is He's called us to do.

It was clear to Nehemiah and to Israel. It was clear to Israel's enemies. This work, 52 days for this project, could only be done with the help of their God. And this help started in prayer.

The Sacrifice of the People

We see Nehemiah sacrificing, and we know the people sacrificed as well. This is what chapter 7 is all about.

Just look in your Bibles there. We're not going to read it all. It's essentially a genealogy. If you go to Ezra chapter 2 - I'm not going to have you turn there - you'll read essentially the same names. This is the second time this genealogy is written in Scripture.

It's very interesting. These are the names of people who had returned to Jerusalem during the very first return to the Holy Land. They had been exiled to Babylon. Persia took over Babylon, and when Cyrus, the first king of Persia, came to power, he told the Jewish people, "Y'all can go back home."

But only about 2% of the people, according to scholars, chose to go back. Most of them had built homes there in Babylon, which was then Persia. Most of them were comfortable. They had their lifestyles there. Many of them had been born into captivity.

Only 2% of the population that was exiled went back. Scripture gives us their names on two different occasions. Why? It's essentially giving credit where credit is due. It's a way of honoring what they did.

Returning to Jerusalem was a sacrifice. Their homes were in Babylon. Why go back? They didn't even know what awaited them there. Plus, it was 800 to 1,000 miles. That's like you and me starting this afternoon, on foot, walking to Colorado.

Who wants to do that? No Buc-ee's back in the day, all right? No thanks.

Again, they had homes. They had lives. But this group of Jewish pilgrims went back, not even knowing if they would survive the trek. They sacrificed. They went by faith, and they gave.

Look at verses 70 through 72 in Nehemiah 7:

Now some of the heads of fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 darics of gold, 50 basins, 30 priests' garments and 500 minas of silver.

And some of the heads of fathers' houses gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 darics of gold and 2,200 minas of silver.

And what the rest of the people gave was 20,000 darics of gold, 2,000 minas of silver, and 67 priests' garments.

— Nehemiah 7:70-72

These people were poor. They didn't have much of anything. Yet together - and we see this theme in Nehemiah as well - side by side, more than 30 times around the wall, we read that so-and-so was next to so-and-so, and so-and-so was next to so-and-so.

Together these people sacrificed. They worked, and they gave toward the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Some scholars estimate the darics of gold, the minas of silver, and the priests' garments here to be worth around \$5 million. Together. They had nothing individually, but together they gave.

It's a tremendous sacrifice.

You know how, when we get through with a movie, we just change the channel or leave? Nobody sits through the credits. Well, that's what Nehemiah 7 is. It's the credits.

God, in two different places in Scripture, Ezra 2 and here in Nehemiah 7, says, "No, I want to make sure that these people who sacrificed, these people who gave, get the credit. I want you to know who they are."

It's kind of like Hebrews chapter 11, this hall of faith: "I want you to know who they are." And He rolls the credits, name after name.

Commentator Warren Wiersbe said, "The important thing is not to count the people, but to realize these people counted."

Nehemiah and all the people knew that God, and what He had called them to, was worthy of their all. So they sacrificed.

The Motive Behind Sacrifice

I want you to go back to that major point we established at the beginning of this message. I said, "What makes sacrifice significant is the motive behind it."

It's not sacrifice in and of itself that's important. We can make sacrifices and have them not be an act of worship. This is the history of Israel.

In Isaiah chapter 1, the prophet Isaiah speaks on behalf of the Lord:

*What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of well-fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.*

*When you come to appear before me,
who has required of you
this trampling of my courts?
Bring no more vain offerings;
incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations -
I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.
Your new moons and your appointed feasts
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.
When you spread out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.*

*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless,
plead the widow's cause.*

— Isaiah 1:11-17

David said it like this:

*For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.*

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

— Psalm 51:16-17

Micah said the same thing, speaking on behalf of God: "Don't bring Me your offerings, but instead, walk justly. Be kind. Walk humbly with your God."

Jesus said the same thing in Matthew chapter 5. He said, "If you're bringing your gift to the altar and you remember that your brother has something against you, leave the gift, go make it right, and then come back and offer your gift."

Paul said the same thing. He said you can have all of the prophetic gifts, you can be filled with the Spirit and have all of these things, but if you have not love, you have gained nothing.

Sacrifice void of the right motive is empty. It's vain. It's not an act of worship.

What makes sacrifice significant, what makes it an act of worship, is the motive behind it.

We see two motives that bounce off the pages of Scripture time and time again in the book of Nehemiah. These are two motives that fueled their sacrifice.

The first was the glory of God.

You trace this work back to the very beginning, and it was all about the glory of God.

Nehemiah 2:8 says:

And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

— Nehemiah 2:8

In Nehemiah 2:12, he spoke of:

What my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem.

— Nehemiah 2:12

Then he said:

The God of heaven will make us prosper.

— Nehemiah 2:20

In Nehemiah 4:15, God frustrated the plans of the enemy. Then Nehemiah said:

Our God will fight for us.

— Nehemiah 4:20

We read it today in Nehemiah 6:16:

They perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

— Nehemiah 6:16

The glory of God. This is why Nehemiah and the people of Israel stayed committed and rebuilt the walls. The city of God was in reproach. His name was being negatively reflected upon, and Nehemiah and the people weren't having it. They said, "This is for the glory of God."

Time after time, as he rallied the people, this is what he rallied them to: "You're doing a great work for the glory of God."

The first motivation that fueled their sacrifice was the glory of God.

The second motivation was the good of people.

Again, we see it at every turn in the book of Nehemiah. He had the good of the people in his mind and heart as he led them.

This is why, as we saw today in our reading from Nehemiah 5, he didn't exploit the people. He didn't take advantage of them.

It's why, in Nehemiah chapter 3, he put them together in family units. He knew they knew each other, they loved each other, and they would fight for one another.

It's why he gave them a sword. It's why he gave them a trowel, so that one could build and one could be on the lookout. It's why he put watchmen over the city.

It's why the people rallied to build the wall, no matter how tough it got or how tired they were. Talk about sacrifice. Nehemiah 4:23 said they didn't take off their clothes. They didn't stop building. They didn't put their weapons down until the project was completed.

Why? Because this wall needed to be built for the sake of the people. It was for the glory of God and for the good of people. They needed safety. They needed protection.

They were working together, looking out for one another. Again, their names are listed twice in Scripture because of their sacrifice and commitment to the work of God.

What made their sacrifice significant was the motive behind it. It was the glory of God and the good of people that fueled their sacrifice and motivated them to accomplish what seemed impossible.

Equal Sacrifice

In this brochure from 1976, one of the very first campaigns of this church, I told you they were trying to raise \$400,000. Speaking of sacrifice, Pastor Robin Guess, our first pastor, penned a letter to the congregation. I want to read a portion of it as it relates to sacrifice.

He said, "To the generous fellowship of believers: Once again, we are called upon to rise and build."

He's taking language from the book of Nehemiah.

He said, "'Together We Build' is one of the most exciting ventures we've ever launched. It will be the most demanding challenge we've ever undertaken. That's why sacrifice is the key to success.

"Our total contributions may vary according to the wages earned. One hundred dollars to one person may equal \$10,000 to another. However, equal sacrifice will do the job.

"I offer no apology for going after all of it."

I love this man. I never met him, and I love him.

He said, "All of us will reach a new spiritual peak in our lives as we give with equal sacrifice."

Then I loved how he signed it: "Rejoicing with a big hallelujah, Robin Guess."

I told you my heart has been full this week, hearing stories. What I've heard are stories of equal sacrifice.

I've had pictures sent to me of children who were selling cookies and bringing the proceeds to the church. I got a picture yesterday of some sweet young girls at a lemonade stand in the neighborhood, selling lemonade to bring their offering to the Lord.

I had a man come into my office this week. By his own admission, he said, "Pastor, I don't have much. But God has woken me up two times during this NEXT series we've been going through. In the middle of the night, He told me to bring you this."

He brought a tub in and said, "This is what I have as retirement."

It was a collection of silver that he'd been collecting for years. He estimates it to be somewhere around \$30,000 to \$40,000.

He said, "I'm giving it to the Lord."

We prayed right there in my office. He made his sacrifice, and we dedicated it to the Lord.

I got a text message on Friday from two people who aren't even members of our church. They watch online, and they said, I quote, "We feel the Lord leading us to be a part of NEXT steps at Champion Forest. We believe in you and the church to do what God has called you to do. We are both going to give \$100,000 now and \$75,000 for the next two years. So we're committing \$250,000 each, for a total of \$500,000, to this three-year project."

They're not even members of our church.

Pastor Ramon messaged me yesterday. We have a man in our Spanish congregation that will meet right after us. He's an engineer, and he's here on a work visa. Because of these unsettling times in our immigration system, he may have to return to the country he came from. He's working on it, going through the right process and paperwork to stay.

But as he's been here working, this church has ministered to him in an amazing way.

He said, "Despite the uncertainty, my faith remains firm. Since arriving at Champion Forest, the church has deeply impacted my life and the life of my family. I don't know what will happen or where I will be, but I give in faith because, just as the church has been a blessing to me and my family, it will be a blessing to others who do not yet know Jesus."

All kinds of gifts. All kinds of people who have said yes to the Lord: "I'll sacrifice. I'll work. I'll help take my place and stack some bricks on the wall."

Not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice. All for the glory of God and the good of people.

A thousand years from now, a million years from now, none of what we're sacrificing toward today, from a physical standpoint, will probably be here. But the impact of our sacrifice and what we're doing in this moment will last forever in the lives of men, women, boys, and girls who hear the gospel message because of our faith and sacrifice today and are disciplined in their faith.

Champion Forest, for the glory of God and the good of people, let's add to our church history today. Let's stretch. Let's, by faith, sacrifice, because He and His kingdom are worthy of our all.